CAMEO

THE MAGAZINE OF ROMANTIC FICTION

AUGUST
$1.50

FEATURING TWO COMPLETE NOVELS

MIRAGE ON THE AMAZON

JULIA'S VICTORIAN WORLD IS SHATTERED BY A PERILOUS JUNGLE JOURNEY

A MEMORY OF SUMMER

WHY DID MATT RETURN AND MAKE HER REMEMBER?

PLUS SHORT STORIES AND FEATURES INCLUDING

THE EMERALD

AND

A LETTER TO MY LOVE

A NO NONSENSE LOOK AT SMART SHOPPING.

Cinch your waist for the latest wide-belt look. Pick a bold, bright color to top off basic shirts and blouses and dresses, too. Have some fashion fun for your money at $21.00.

An enamel flower will bloom on your neck today, a lapel, hat or a scarf tomorrow. Plant it on a wardrobe of different ribbons, by-the-yard for pennies. You can pick your favorite flower for only $6.00.

A striped cardigan leads a double life as a jacket or sweater. Dresses up a skirt or turns casual over pants. A bright buy at $60.00.

No nonsense® panty hose, with a cotton-lined ventilated panel for cool comfort, three proportioned sizes and a beautifully sheer fabric. With all that fit, all that comfort, all at a No nonsense price, they're a very smart buy. From $1.39.

Yes, the wool skirt that goes with everything is a beautiful investment. Very simply cut for a long fashion life. Well worth $25.00.

No nonsense "Regular panty panty hose"
No nonsense "Queen size panty hose"
"Sheer to waist panty
No nonsense "Wide band knee highs"
No nonsense "Control top panty hose"
No nonsense "Comfort Stride panty hose"
No nonsense "Easy to be me." panties & hose all in one

No nonsense fit and comfort at a No nonsense price.™ That's No nonsense® panty hose.

Available in food, drug, and other stores. © 1980 No Nonsense Fashions, Inc.

Panasonic introduces the Double Alarm clock radio.

No matter which one of you gets up first, the new Panasonic AM/FM digital clock radio with Double Alarm (RC-95) means you won't have to reset the alarm in the morning.

Just set the first alarm for 6:30. Then set the second alarm for 8:00. Now forget it, but get set to get up at 6:30. Or 8:00.

You can awake with a buzz or with a beat. You two may have to compromise on the station, but we'd never ask you to compromise on the sound. Even at 6:30 AM our 3″ dynamic speaker sounds like dynamite.

Since sometimes you want to get going a little earlier, our fast-reverse button makes it easy to set back an alarm, say, ½ an hour, without going through 23½ hours to get there. Our fast-forward makes it easy to set the time ahead, too. And it's so easy to see the time you've set on our fluorescent digital display with dimmer. A quick squint will tell you the time, the date and even whether it's day or night.

Day or night, you also get a power failure indicator, childproof controls, a 59-minute sleep timer, a doze control and a 2-year limited warranty.*

The new Panasonic AM/FM digital clock radio with Double Alarm. It's the one thing you two need. (Now if we could only get it to fry eggs...for two.)

*For two years after purchase, Panasonic will repair or replace parts if purchased in the U.S.A. You must bring the radio to an authorized service center with proof of purchase. Warranty does not cover damage from abuse, misuse or commercial use. Cabinetry is simulated wood.

Because he gets up at 6:30 and she gets up at 8:00.

Panasonic®
just slightly ahead of our time.

CONTENTS

A Letter from the Editor 3

NOVELS

Memory of Summer 16
by Anne Neville

Suddenly Matt was back again, testing Kate's resolve never to let him into her life again . . .

Mirage On The Amazon 28
by Mary Kistler

The story of Julia who, against all odds, found the courage to fall in love . . .

SHORT STORIES

Early One Morning 4
by E.A. Carruthers

Mermaid princesses are lovely, but as Sir Richard found out, they can bite.

A Letter To My Love 10
by Patricia Condon

The uproarious and often furious correspondence course conducted by these two neighbors leads to a passion of a different sort . . .

The Emerald 22
by Vera Henry

Christie and Doug's honeymoon was idyllic, until the old Scottish feud came back to haunt them . . .

The Perfect Spring 26
by Mary Ward

The garden and its glorious gift came alive, bringing her the joy of a lifetime . . .

FEATURES

A Heroine In History: Jasmine 13
by Jordan Faith Kensington

Cameo Love Signs 95
by Phoebe Matthews

POETRY

Miracle 8
by Samuel R. Davenport

You 43
by Bessie McGill Stetson

Reason 62
by Ruth Zimmerman

Tides 68
by Barbara Reid

Rendezvous 83
by Maggie Boyajian

L Robertson '80

CAMEO
THE MAGAZINE OF ROMANTIC FICTION

August 1980
Volume 1 Number 3

Editor
MANON TINGUE

Associate Editor
KAREN JOHNSON

Contributing Editor
SUSAN SCHNEIDER

Art Director
MARY KORNBLUM

Production
ANDREW WALKER

Advertising Director
JOYCE K. FUCHS

Circulation
WILLIAM SMITH

Cameo is published monthly by Publication Enterprises, Inc. at 50 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N.Y. 10020. Application to mail at controlled circulation postage rates is pending at Sparta, Ill. Subscription rates: In the U.S. $12.00 for one year, $22.00 for two years, $30.00 for three years; for subscriptions outside of U.S. and its possessions, add $2.00. Please direct all subscription correspondence to: Cameo Magazine, P.O. Box 183, Mount Morris, IL 61054.

General Editorial and Advertising offices are located at 50 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, NY 10020. The entire contents of Cameo are copyrighted © 1980 by Publication Enterprises, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be reproduced in any manner without the written permission of the publisher.

While manuscripts will be carefully considered, Cameo can assume no responsibility for unsolicited materials. All query letters and manuscripts must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Cover Illustration by
Franco Accornero

Captain Eric Sorenson and Julia stand on the deck of the riverboat *Toucan*, and view the lush Amazon foliage, from the novel . . . *Mirage On The Amazon*.

A Letter from the Editor

Dear Reader,

CAMEO welcomes you this month to an issue filled with exciting romantic fiction!

Mirage on the Amazon, is one of the most enthralling novels we've read in a long time. It takes you down the dangerous river with its heroine Julia through exotic forest and steamy climates. Julia's journey down a river surrounded by a beautiful but treacherous jungle leads her to romance.

Romance, of course, is found in many forms and expressed in many ways. Another expression of love is A Memory of Summer which sets a contemporary pace and casts you into England's cool countryside.

Variety is the spice of love and the heart of a magazine. CAMEO's short stories range from A Perfect Spring— a love story that will touch you as few stories ever will— to A Letter to My Love, a lighthearted look at an unusual way to begin a romantic relationship.

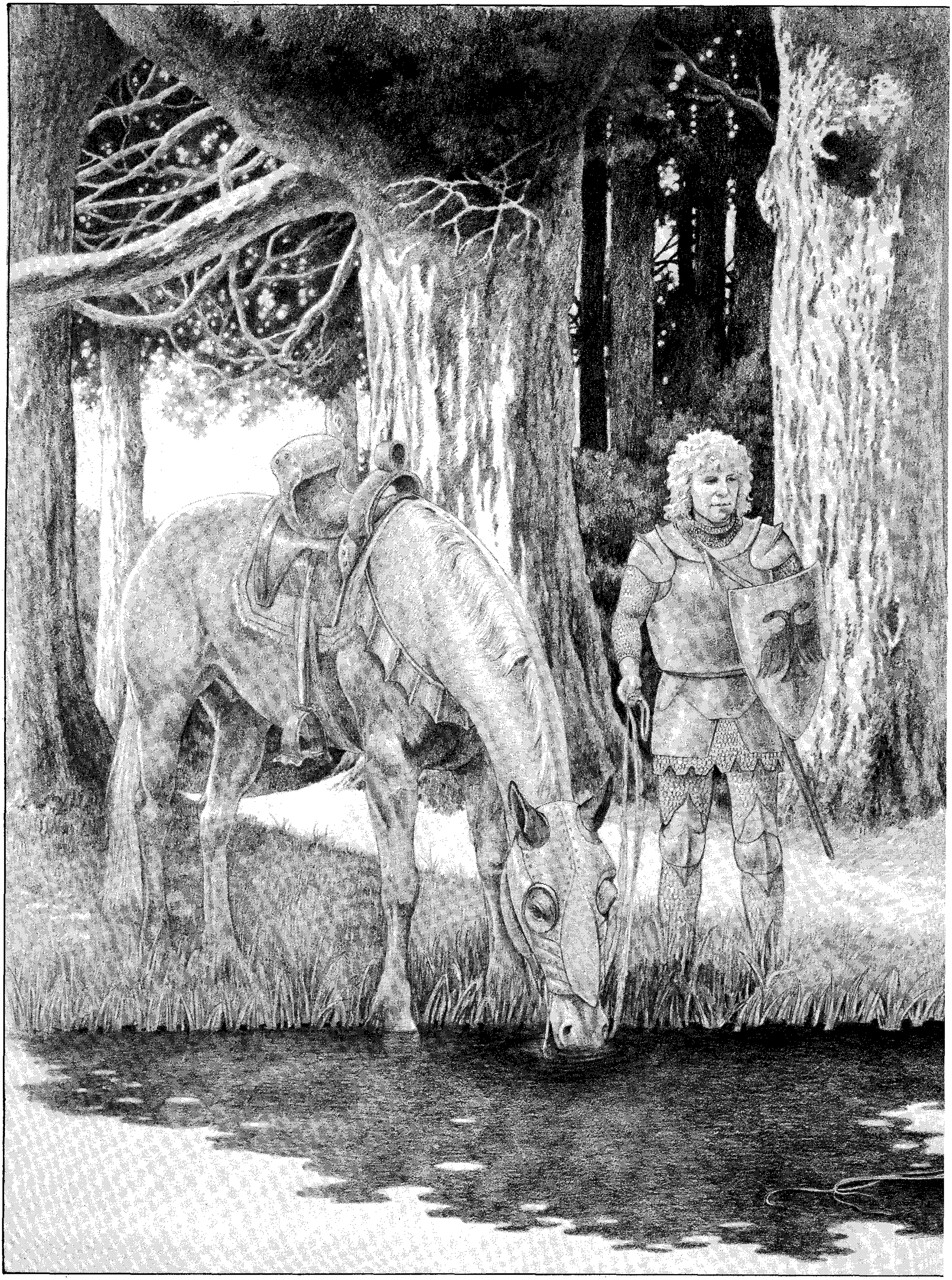
History is filled with stories of love and in Jasmine we find the story of a fiercely proud heroine whose destiny is controlled by the power of one man in a time drastically different from our own.

CAMEO offers you moments of love, poems and romantic quotes— romance in many, many forms. Come with us and let your imagination take flight.

Happy Summer Reading,

Manon Tingue

Manon Tingue
Editor



Illustrated by Ruth Sanderson

Early One Morning

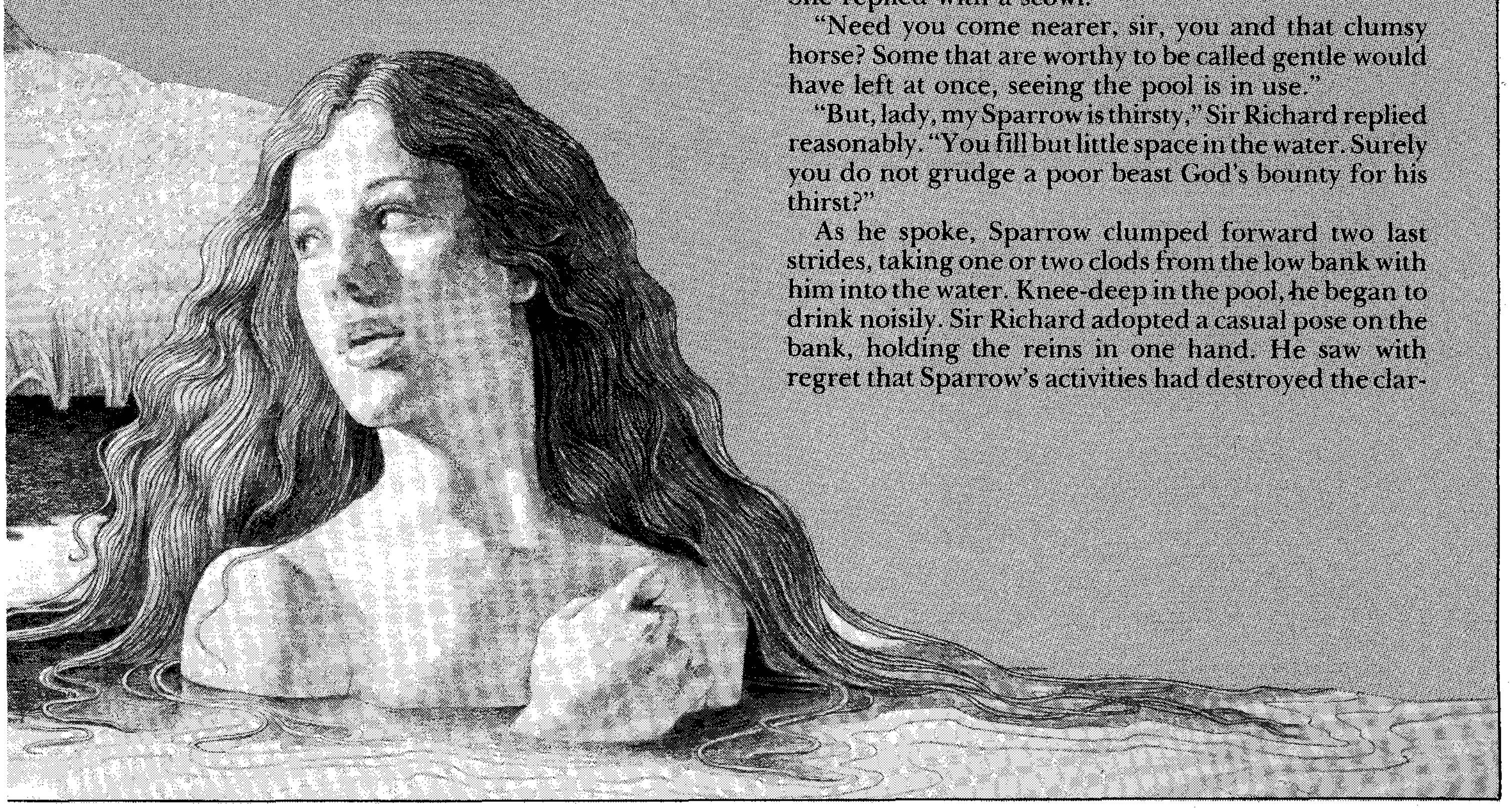
All Sir Richard wanted for escorting the Princess home was his supper. Instead, he faced a battery of hostile knights and worse, a maid with a temper and a sure aim.

If the girl in the water had not squealed, Sir Richard might never have seen her. And that would have been a pity, he thought later. At the time he had other matters on his mind, but an encounter with a lady's clothes on the bank, and with the lady herself in the pool, began the day well.

"My gown!" she cried, not looking at Sir Richard but staring at the right front hoof of his horse. Sir Richard followed her gaze to discover Sparrow's hoof planted firmly on a pretty frock. His eye also took in a flounced petticoat, a pair of fine woolen hose, and, sitting conveniently on a log, a pair of dainty slippers. He turned back to their owner with renewed interest. Quickly he established there was little to be seen of her; a rather pretty face, long, wet hair descending into the water, and a glimmer beneath the surface.

"Come, Sparrow," said Sir Richard, urging the horse off the muddy frock and toward the promised drink. Sparrow obeyed, placing after the fashion of quadrupeds his right rear hoof very near the splotch of mud left by his front hoof.

A short story by E. A. Carruthers



The lady winced visibly. then, as man and horse approached the pool, another thought seemed to cross her mind. Her glance fled abruptly from her trampled finery to Sir Richard's face, and she backed slowly into the willows that overhung the not very far distant bank. This was but a little pool. A tiny stream poured into it over a tumble of mossy rocks and flowed lazily past the roots of a half-fallen willow into the sun.

At that early hour the pool was in shadow. And with all the recent rain, the water was probably cold, Sir Richard thought, swinging gracefully from his saddle. He glanced speculatively at the oval face among the willows and thought he caught a hint of blue about the lips. Indeed, the pallor of the face accentuated the blue of the eyes and the darkness of the hair. For a moment he was uneasily reminded the old women's tales of the water-maidens who enticed young men, or even young knights, deep, deep into the water, to the cold embrace of roots and the clinging weeds. But this girl look frightened, and reassuringly enough, as Sir Richard watched she began to shiver. He grinned across the little pool.

"Good morrow to you, lady," he greeted her cheerfully. She replied with a scowl.

"Need you come nearer, sir, you and that clumsy horse? Some that are worthy to be called gentle would have left at once, seeing the pool is in use."

"But, lady, my Sparrow is thirsty," Sir Richard replied reasonably. "You fill but little space in the water. Surely you do not grudge a poor beast God's bounty for his thirst?"

As he spoke, Sparrow clumped forward two last strides, taking one or two clods from the low bank with him into the water. Knee-deep in the pool, he began to drink noisily. Sir Richard adopted a casual pose on the bank, holding the reins in one hand. He saw with regret that Sparrow's activities had destroyed the clarity of the water. The lady backed further into the willow roots with an expression of distaste. The bluish tinge on her lips was by now unmistakable, but the lady answered as if she were sitting warm upon a throne, wrapped in furs.

"Was there not enough of God's bounty brought to him direct last night, sir, that he must intrude now?"

She had a point. God had been more bountiful last night than Sir Richard considered entirely necessary. He and Sparrow had made the best of it under a stand of oaks during the downpour, but Sparrow was sodden, with all his tack, and Sir Richard's quilted gambeson under his suit of chain-mail still squelched as he moved.

"Lady," he said, to turn the subject, "where do you live, when you are not adorning Sparrow's drinking trough?"

He ducked just in time. A large green frog flew past his ear, landed on the wet bank behind Sir Richard, looked around in confusion for a moment, and fled to the roots of a friendly willow. Sir Richard was impressed. Not many women could throw so far, let alone so straight. Fortunately the overarm throw revealed the dark hair to be longer than it had seemed.

"Lady," said Sir Richard, "that hair of yours is long and very lovely. Yet it is not, I fear, an adequate garment." He paused and grinned. More adult, he thought, than scrambling after another frog to throw back at her. More effective, too, for the lady sank at once until the water reached her chin. Suddenly Sir Richard was sorry for her. He was wet and cold himself. Best be on his way and let the poor girl come out and dress. He was turning away, but the angry young voice stopped him. Was there a hint of tears in it?

"I live in my father's castle, but a mile or two along the road. When I am not bathing in my father's stream that runs through his land."

"Where are your maids, then, young mistress of the castle?" If this was really old Sir Kevin's daughter, Richard might yet change the day's fortune to good. Surely she was worth at least a hot meal and a chance to dry his clothes at the castle.

"They are at home. I am not so much a servant to my maids that I may not go about at my choosing."

"Is Sir Kevin so careless of his daughter?" He drew himself up, and yet another dribble of rainwater ran down his back. "Are you certain you are Sir Kevin's daughter?"

"I know who is my father," she replied hotly. "Are you so certain of yours?"

"My lineage is on my shield," Richard returned haughtily, turning to swing the new shield with its smart chevrons into view. The polished surface caught the sun and startled Sparrow, who appeared to have been dozing on his feet. The horse shied, catching Richard off guard and off balance. Sparrow plunged off the bank, into and out of the stream and back up the bank he had just lately descended. the man followed the horse smartly, as perforce he must, man and horse now caked in mud half-way to their knees. By the time he had reasserted his mastery and brought Sparrow once again to the brink of the stream, Richard was in an ill mood. The mischief in the blue eyes across the pool and the grin upon the blue lips did not mend matters.

"Well, then, Sir Kevin's daughter, tell me. What worth does your noble father set by you, that allows you to stray without protection beyond his walls." It was a rough speech for Sir Richard, but, he mused again, the girl had to be worth at least a hot meal to her father.

◆

Intreat me not to leave thee,
And to return from following after thee:
For wither thou goest, I will go;
And where thou lodgest, I will lodge;
Thy people shall be my people,
And thy God my God;
Where thou diest, will I die,
And there will I be buried:
The Lord do so to me,
And more also,
If aught but death part thee and me.

The Bible
Old Testament
Ruth 1:16-17

◆

"Great worth," she said, and the smile was gone. "Only take me safe home, and he will give you—" She paused, and then continued resolutely. "He will give you my hand and all my portion to that."

Richard almost laughed. The girl had been listening to too many troubadours' ballads, spinning out romantic nonsense of damsels in distress, recreant knights, etc. She must have forgotten that distressed damsels were usually in full court attire and reclining in a silken pavilion while Sir Knight was always well-dressed, well fed, warm, and, above all, dry. Richard glanced at the sodden earth and flinched. He was, he hoped, no less a man than another, but the girl was safe from him this day.

Carefully looking away from the pool, he said, "I shall take you, then, safe home to your father, and received the promised reward. Come now, and dress yourself, and then you shall show me the way."

After what seemed a decent interval he turned to find her buckling her second shoe. He observed the mud on the back of her gown where Sparrow stepped on it and, when she turned toward him, the prints that Sparrow left upon her bodice. Nonetheless, she bore herself like a king's daughter. The mixture of fear and defiance in her face were those of a little maid, but the set of her chin was a woman's.

Richard resolved to keep his advantage, which seemed a precarious one.

"Mount behind me on Sparrow."

"That you may ride off with me whither you will? Not I."

"He that would ride off with you within two miles of your father's castle were a fool. The time for harming you is ten minutes past. Mount behind me and show me the road."

She hesitated and then mounted behind him, pillion-style, her arms around his waist. Even through his mail shirt and sodden gambeson, he felt her shivering still with cold. What a madcap she must be, lord's daughter or no! To go out at dawn of a spring day and bathe naked in a pool, with none to guard.

The castle was not far. As they approached the gates, Richard was already anticipating the fire that was sure to be roaring this chilly morn in Sir Kevin's study, when abruptly the lady let go her hold on Richard, sprang lightly from Sparrow, and fled like a frightened hare through the gatehouse, under the portcullis, and into the outer ward. As a score of men-at-arms materialized in the gatehouse, blocking all hope of Sparrow's passage, the lady whirled to face Richard and chant to all who would listen—and there seemed to be many:

"Behold! There stands a fool without —and here's yet a *maid* within!"

While Richard watched, the damsel spun around again, picked up her skirts, and dashed toward the ultimate safety of the inner yard. Sir Kevin's fine, warm fire disappeared with her and Richard's heart sank into his stomach, reminding him of the latter's emptiness. Finding no support in his stomach, Sir Richard promptly turned to his wits and lost them. He addressed the captain of Sir Kevin's guard in a tone of command.

"What's this?" he enquired, with the vigour of dashed hope and hunger. "Did

I not fetch the lady safe home to her father? And did she not promise I should be none the worse for doing so? What merry sport does she practice now? I'll see Sir Kevin, if you please, and at once."

The captain seemed to consider a moment, then said, "Aye, you'll see Sir Kevin. You'll see enough of Sir Kevin, I've no doubt." He then addressed his men, "Let his young knightship in, that will see Sir Kevin."

The men parted, not ill-pleased, it seemed, to do so, and closed in behind as Sparrow passed. Richard's wits returned and he looked about uneasily. His face, however, maintained its hauteur.

As they entered the inner ward, the captain politely invited Sir Richard to dismount and relieved him of his sword and shield. Casually, three men-at-arms strolled up to accompany them. Richard ignored them.

"See that my steed is well housed," he ordered the groom holding Sparrow's reins, "and give him good feed of grain." He paced slowly after the captain, making sure his feet rang on the stone flags.

Sir Kevin's study, reached by climbing stone stairs, was in one of the castle's three towers. The fire was just as Richard had imagined. The captain and men-at-arms stepped left and right to flank the single door as they entered. Sir Kevin was not in the room.

The fire satisfied Richard's dreams. His feet were nearly warm, and a gentle steam was beginning to rise from the rest of him, when a scrabbling sound on the stone stairs heralded the arrival of a young page. The page dashed frantically in the door and across the room, threw two fresh logs on the fire, extinguished the smoking oil lamps, and placed Sir Kevin's chair beside the fire. From a cupboard, the lad fetched a flagon and a single cup.

At that moment Sir Kevin stepped over the threshold. Without pausing or glancing about him, Sir Kevin paced to the chair, seated himself, and held out a hand into which the boy placed the cup. Sir Kevin drank, held out the cup again, settled himself yet more comfortably in his chair, and looked for the first time at Sir Richard. Sir Richard glanced longingly at the wine, then returned his look. After an interval, Sir Kevin spoke. "What's this my daughter tells me?"

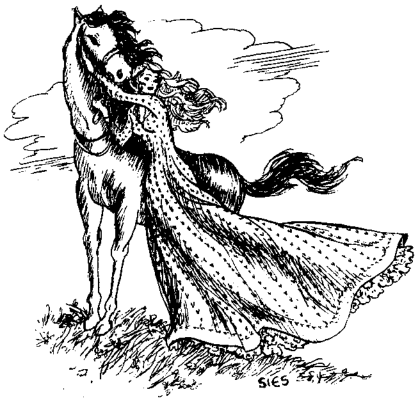
Sir Kevin's square-cut beard went well with the powerful shoulders and the thick, square brows. Richard winced at the thought of his own fair fuzz, barely able yet to hide the contour of his jaw. He raised the fuzz a trifle higher and looked directly at Sir Kevin.

"Indeed, sir, I know not," he answered honestly, "though if she be truthful it cannot be to my discredit. What *does* she tell you?"

"Not to your discredit?"

"No, sir. Does the lady tell you otherwise?"

"The Lady Jane tells me, sir, that you came upon her unawares by the poolside and there did greatly menace her honor. Peace, sir! A moment. The Lady Jane tells me further, sir, that she saved herself from disgrace by her own quick wit, promising you a reward from me if you would convey her safely home. Having, happily, succeeded with her ruse, she maintains that she is yet a maid and that you, sir, are a recreant and a gull."



Richard laughed. This was no time for mirth, with four men-at-arms ready to cut his throat, but surely the tale was straight from one of the little lady's ministrel ballads. The square brows came slowly together, reminding Richard of his danger.

"To be sure, the lady is yet a maid. At least, she is not less a maid than she was when first I saw her." The brows stayed where they were. This was not, perhaps, the best approach to the maid's father. Richard decided on a more factual response.

"Last night, sir, not knowing we were near your gates, my horse and I spent in the open, beneath the storm.". The small puddle forming around Richard's feet would attest to the truth of that remark. "This morning, early, I led my horse to water at the stream that runs near the highway not two miles from your castle. Where the stream widens to a pool, I found the lady bathing. After some discourse, I fetched her safely home upon my charger. There is no more to say."

"For what fee fetched you the lady safely home?" The hard eyes half hidden beneath the solid brows didn't seem grateful for the recovery of a lost child.

"I was promised, sir, the lady's hand and all her wealth, but all I had in mind, sir, not being as unaccustomed to the world as her little ladyship, was an hour or two's hospitality from the lady's parents, and possibly a meal."

"Shall I believe this modesty, sir, when it seems that you could claim so much, and may have taken more?"

Was that a gleam of amusement beneath Sir Kevin's massive brow, despite his words? Did he think Sir Richard a beggar now? What if Sir Kevin should laugh, throw Sir Richard a purse, and send him to feast in the kitchen? The thought was insupportable. Sir Richard continued with a haste that once again outstripped his wits.

"Indeed, sir, I hope you will believe the truth. And pray consider, sir, that had I desired your daughter's hand, the way to make it sure would have not been to bring her safe home, but to ensure that she had speedy need of a husband."

So they thought the girl irresistible, did they, father and daughter both? The momentum of his last sentence carried him forward, past the efforts of his weary wits to catch him up.

"And while it may be, sir, that your taste turns to shivering, sharp-tongued children standing in a pool of cold water, still—"

"Silence!"

Richard had gone too far. The utter silence from the four men-at-arms behind him and the angle at which the round-eyed little cup-bearer held the forgotten flagon together should have told him so. A silent moment passed, while Richard matched the glare beneath Sir Kevin's brow as best he could.

"No man insults my daughter, sir," said Sir Kevin at last, pronouncing each syllable with care. "No man. Tomorrow, sir, at this hour, we shall meet, sir, in the inner ward, in full harness, and there we shall debate this matter. Remove him!"

The guard stepped forward.

"And when we meet, sir," Richard said quickly, "my cause will be to maintain my word and your daughter's, and thereby your daughter's honor. For what cause, sir, will you fight?"

"Out!"

The room rang with the shout and so for a moment did Sir Richard's ears, as the men-at-arms hurried him down the winding stone stair. A clash of something metal and hollow striking stone came after them, as did a single shrill yelp, and then in haste the little page.

"Now, did you *have* to?" wearily asked the leader of Sir Richard's guards, as the five men emerged into the inner ward and the boy fled toward the kitchen. "He'll be like that for days, now."

"She's Little Mistress Perfect to him, is Lady Jane," added another. "Couldn't you have said how clever she was, fooling you so? He'd a-laughed, then, and been right with us all."

"Aye," moaned a third, "and couldn't you have said anything else, *anything*, except that you didn't fancy her?"

"Well, I didn't," returned Richard crossly. "I'd sat in the rain all night, I was as wet as she was in her pool, and what I wanted was a dry change and a hot meal."

"Well, you're for it now," said the captain. "I'd a-give you a meal before this happened, but there'll be nothing now without his lordship's orders."

They had reached an empty storeroom in the next tower. The room, a stone cylinder, had a roof of heavy wooden beams, but it was dry, and the slit in the wall admitted light.

"You'll be right enough here until morning," said the captain, looking around. "His lordship didn't say chains, so I'll fetch none. Pleasant thinking!"

"Thank you," glumly replied Sir Richard, and then, as the men were leaving, "Stay! Honest fellow."

"Aye?"

"I've not a single coin about me to give you, but will you see my horse fares better than I this day? He at least had no designs upon the lady."

"He fares better already, for he stands in good straw. But I'll see him to a forkful or two of hay."

"Thank you."

The door was shut and locked. The little room was as cold as a cave. Little light came through the slit, and less sound. Richard's heart sank into his undernourished stomach, and he felt the cold deep within his limbs. The time before Sir Kevin's fire had not been long enough to dry even Richard's hose, and the sodden gambeson still dripped. He could sit or stand on the bedrock floor. At last he sat. He must have slept, despite cold and hunger, for the key in the lock roused him, and he saw a queen of Faërie step through the door and fill the room with light. Half risen, he beheld her long.

The lightbringer addressed him, "Close, sir, I pray, your mouth." Richard blinked, and saw Lady Jane, clad this time in a gown of rich blue velvet and standing in the narrow beam the sun was sending through the window-slit.

"Madam," he observed.

"Quite so. Will it please your excellence to rise, most noble sir, or is it the custom of your excellency always to perceive guests while sprawled upon the floor?"

Lady Jane it was, clothed or unclothed. Sir Richard rose slowly and with grace.

"Your servant, lady," he greeted her, and then noticed with a lurch of dismay that she was alone. "Where are your maids, lady?" he blurted before he could stop himself.

"You seem determined, sir, that I shall go nowhere but as a bondmaid to my servants."

"What would your father do, lady, if he knew you were here alone with me?"

◆

MIRACLE

By Samuel R. Davenport

You swept in glory through the trees
Into my woodland glade.
Nor ever from my memories
Will that lone instant fade.
And was that bright, brief years ago—
Or was it yesterday—
An angel came from out the skies
To kiss this dreamer on his eyes?

You swept in glory 'midst the dusk,
Serene and yet sublime.
The faintest flitting scent of musk.
A moment froze in Time.
And was that sweet sad years ago—
Or was it yesterday—
A goddess came from awesome peak
To kiss this mortal on his cheek!

◆

"Gut you, sir, and confine me to my chamber for seven days, at the least." And then, as a look of dismay crossed Richard's face, "What does it *matter* what my father would do? What does it matter if they find me here? All hold me now a loose woman. When the bucket is full, though more pours in, it becomes no fuller."

Surely there was a tear in her eye, to make it as bright as that. Despite his troubles, Richard noted how the blue gown set off the fair blue eyes—so much better than had the blue lips of that morning.

"But, lady, why should any think ill of you? Did you not tell them all how clever you had been, to trick me?"

The blue eyes blazed, and Sir Richard saw that she favored her father.

"'Twas your horse, the unlucky beast! May the imps of Satan eat him living!"

"Sparrow? But Sparrow made no attempt upon your virtue. I was there the whole time, and watched. If any accuse you with Sparrow, I will testify—"

This time a chip of stone came flying by his ear, but Richard, more experienced now, avoided the missile by a graceful half-pirouette to his left.

"Recreant! 'Twas your horse's feet!"

"Feet?"

"Aye, feet! He trod upon my gown. Have you forgotten, and so quickly?"

"Forgive me, lady, that my wits seem not the equal of those of your father's people, but though I remember clearly that Sparrow trod on your gown—which was left, by the way, in the public path—it remains unclear to me how a hoofprint on your bodice becomes proof of unchastity."

"'Twas not the hoofprint on the bodice, but that, the gown being laid on its back—and you recall the ground was wet—the weight upon the front smeared all the back with mud."

"Haw!" quoth Sir Richard, grinning through his youthful whiskers. "So now all think . . . ." But a tear ran down her angry cheek, and he was sorry. "But, lady, I cannot mend matters now, except as I mean to do, by fighting your father on the morrow for your honor and my own."

She turned away to dab her cheek, and Richard, musing, asked, "Know you for what cause your father will fight me on the morrow? For I asked him this, and he would not answer, but grew angry."

"For what cause?" She turned in a swirl of blue velvet and stared at him. There was no doubt about it. The red became her lips far better than the blue. "Why, for my honor!"

"Cannot?"

"Nay, for the cause is mine. If I defend my word, that I dealt honorably with you—more honorably, perhaps, than some have tried to deal with me—then I uphold at the same time your own honor. If your father fights me, then by that choice he smirches your honor."

She looked confused.

"By the bye," Richard went on, "how came you here? Do you suppose that no one knows of your visit?"

"You must leave," she said, with decision, ignoring his question. "You must leave at once."

"May I remind you, lady, that I am a prisoner?"

"If you win, and poor Father is hurt. . . but if Father wins . . . . No. You must go. Come with me. At once."

She was stretching out her hand toward the door when it opened of itself, and the captain's head leaned through it, dread mingled with the stubble of his face.

"Lady! Haste! Your father . . ."

In an instant Jane was gone, but she had stayed too late. Through the partly open door of the storeroom, Richard heard light footsteps that fled—not a bad pace, with all that heavy velvet about her ankles—and then he listened to a stirring account of the captain's background, ancestry, and capabilities. There can have been few in the castle who did not listen, extensive though the buildings were. Sir Kevin had a remarkable voice.

". . . in the dungeon," Sir Kevin finished, after some time. "And *alone* in the dungeon. Without company. Alone! This time do you understand me?"

The captain and three men-at-arms marched in the door. Sir Richard joined them. All five marched together across the inner ward to the third tower. There the men-at-arms rolled away the stone that lay across the trap door and lifted the door. They tied a rope around Sir Richard's waist and lowered him some fifteen feet into utter blackness. When his feet touched rock, they threw the rope end after him and dropped the door. He heard them roll the stone back into place. None of them had said a word.

The dungeon had been cut from solid rock, a shaft eight feet across and twice that depth. Its only door was the one by which Richard entered. There was no blacker blackness this side of blindness, and the silence—he could not keep the thought from his mind—was that of a grave. What were Sir Kevin's plans now? If he still intended to hold the duel, Richard would be free of his tomb within hours. But if Sir Kevin went about his business on some other matter, then Richard would find that he was in his tomb indeed.

The gambeson no longer dripped, but still the heavy quilting held moisture. Sir Richard's shoulders ached with shivering, and his stomach seemed to be eating into itself. How beautiful little Jane had looked in the light and the blueness of her gown. How like an elf-queen come to free poor mortals, to grant three magic wishes . . . .

Torchlight woke him, and a clod of earth. Was it possible in these circumstances he had slept again? Aye, and soundly, it would seem. The captain's face, lit all wrong by the torch from above, had apparently been speaking for some time.

"Ar, that got him! Will nothing do to rouse my lord but the last trump, eh? Come! Up that ladder with you, and smartish!"

Richard could not possibly have slept for days, and yet the men were using torches. Was it dawn already, and Sir Kevin impatient for his battle? Richard climbed stiffly up the ladder they had lowered for him. By now the four men-at-arms seemed almost like old friends. They fell in together as before and marched this time to the first tower, the one which held Sir Kevin's study. Sir Richard observed that the men carried torches because it was night. Dawn was hours away. Many hours. What day was it? He would know soon enough.

The five of them filed up the spiral stair to Sir Kevin's study. As before, the men stepped right and left to guard the door. Sir Kevin sat in his armchair by the fire. Sir Richard walked over to the blaze, straightened his shoulders, and lifted his chin. A confusion of time revolved slowly in Richard's mind. This was not this morning again, because he had just seen the night. The boy beside Sir Kevin's chair was not the cup-bearer of the morning. In fact, the boy was not a boy. It was Lady Jane, in a blue gown, downcast and silent beside her father. The fire touched the richness of her gown, the lamplight glinted in her hair, and still somehow she seemed a fair elf-queen.

Sir Kevin cleared his throat. "My daughter points out to me," he began, looking to one side of Sir Richard, "that there are certain difficulties attendent upon my attempting to fight you tomorrow to defend her honor."

"That honor," replied Richard, more loudly than he had intended, "requires no defense." To his astonishment he noticed that his knees were rigid and his fists clenched. Must be the cold.

"Silence," said Sir Kevin, without his usual conviction. "My daughter has further pointed out to me the—ah—clear impression of a horse's hoof upon the bodice of a certain gown." Sir Kevin glared at Sir Richard from beneath the heavy brows. Richard adopted a glazed look and concentrated upon breathing slowly. Sir Kevin continued.

"I am forced to believe, sir, that your actions in this matter have been honorable. I have never, of course, doubted that my daughter's were."

"Of course not, sir," said Sir Richard, staring fixedly at a cusp in the plaster of the far wall.

"However, a portion of my daughter's honor consists in her keeping her pledged word."

Richard blinked.

"My daughter," Sir Kevin went on, "promised you her hand and her portion. Under the—ah—circumstances, I consider it essential that she keep her pledged word, and I have so commanded her. What say you, sir?"

Richard looked at the fragile figure standing beside Sir Kevin's bulk. She half looked up, and he caught the pleading and the refusal to plead. So like her father.

"Well, aye," said Sir Richard, narrowly watching father and daughter, "the maid is fair, but if I might have with her a hot meal this night and perhaps dry raiment—"

This time it was the father's wine cup that passed Sir Richard's head, propelled by the daughter's arm, and this time it was well Sir Richard had been watchful, or it would have caught him fair.

"Done!" said Sir Richard.

A Letter To My Love

Sometimes the pen can be mightier than the sword —especially when it's dealing with love.

1 Bambury Court.
April 3rd

DEAR SIR,

I have made three attempts to call on you personally, but on each occasion you have been out. I am therefore writing to ask if you will be good enough to curtail the duration of your piano-playing sessions as these are now seriously interfering with my sleep. Thank you.

Yours faithfully,
M. Pegley

P.S. I should perhaps explain that my apartment is directly beneath your own.

3 Bambury Court.
April 4th

DEAR SIR,

I am sorry that you have been unable to call on me personally—one wonders in passing, how you could have managed to call on me impersonally?—but I am, from time to time, unable to resist the urge to venture forth into the great outdoors. I am also sorry that my music is keeping you awake, but would respectfully point out that I only play the piano during the day, and that most people sleep during the night. Why don't you try this?

Yours faithfully,
B. J. Brown

P.S. Alternatively, you could move.

1 Bambury Court.
April 5th

SIR,

I do not care for the tone of your letter any more than I care for your music (a term which cannot, on second thought, be accurately applied to the noises which continue, despite my courteous appeal, to make

A short story by Patricia Condon

it impossible for me to rest). For your information I need to sleep during the day because I happen to work at night. Perhaps you will bear this in mind and show a little consideration for those of us who, being less fortunate than yourself it seems, are obliged to earn a living.

Yours faithfully,
M. Pegley (Miss)

P.S. I have lived here for eighteen months and have no intention of moving until it suits me to do so.

3 Bambury Court.
April 6th

DEAR MISS PIGGY (?),

With reference to yours of the 5th instant, I am sorry that I mistook you for a gentleman. It should, of course, have been obvious from the shrill tenor of your first communication that you were a female. I have tried manfully to suppress my burning curiosity as to the nature of your nocturnal employment, but confess that I am deeply intrigued. Having frequently observed the handsome black cat sitting on your window-ledge, and putting two and two together, I now feel impelled to ask whether you are the owner of the broomstick one sees each morning propped against the wall of the communal bicycle shed? You are, regretfully, mistaken in your assumption that I do not have to work for my bread and butter. I am, by profession, a composer, and it is lucky for me that not everyone shares your distaste for my music. I may say, without undue modesty, that my name is becoming fairly well-known and might even strike a familiar chord with you.

Yours sincerely,
Barnabas J. Brown

P.S. It belatedly occurs to me that you could be a policewoman —possibly, even, the magnificently statuesque lady officer who cut short my recent midnight stroll by courteously suggesting that I could seek inspiration just as well, and more safely, at home?

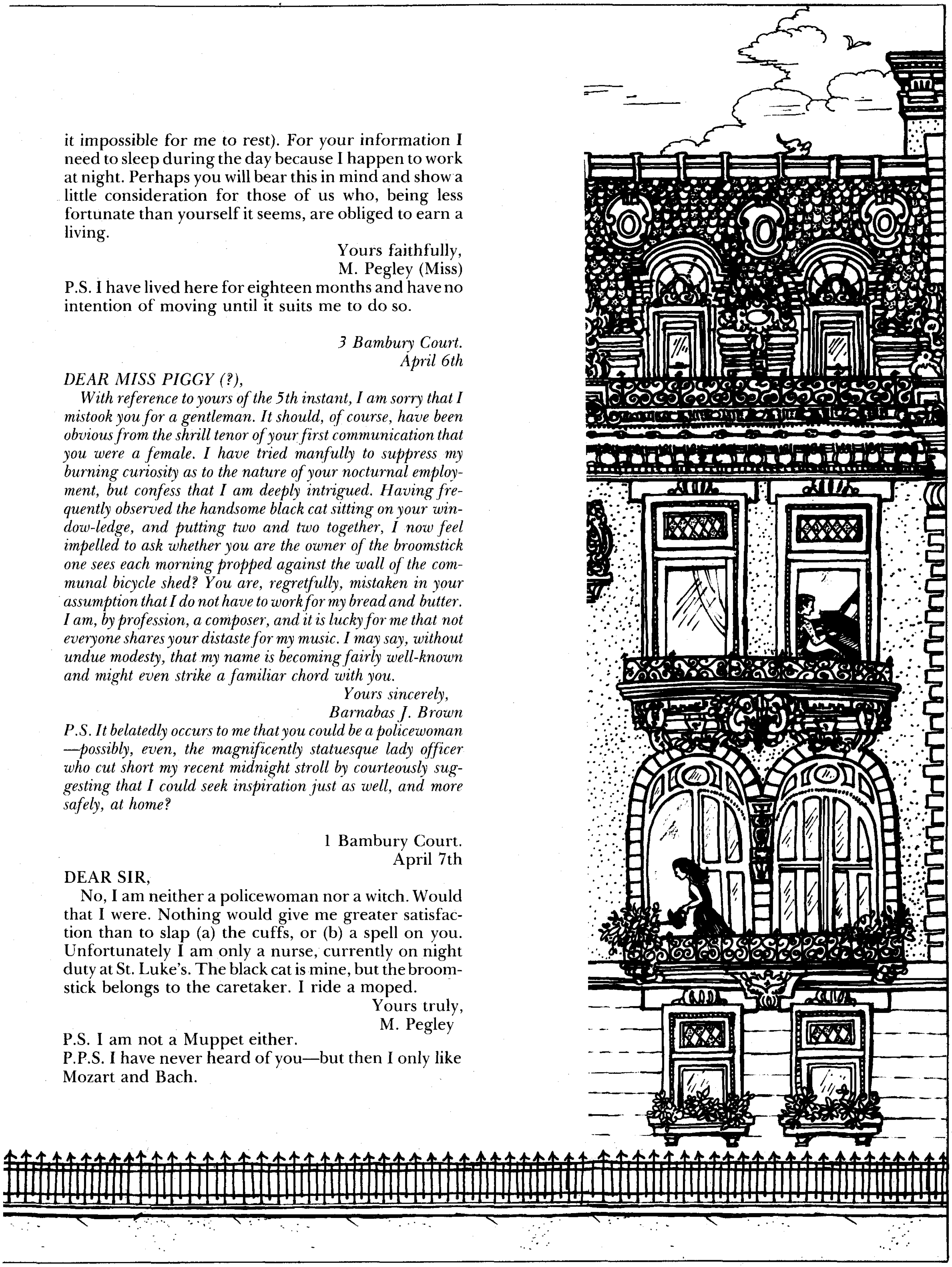
1 Bambury Court.
April 7th

DEAR SIR,

No, I am neither a policewoman nor a witch. Would that I were. Nothing would give me greater satisfaction than to slap (a) the cuffs, or (b) a spell on you. Unfortunately I am only a nurse, currently on night duty at St. Luke's. The black cat is mine, but the broomstick belongs to the caretaker. I ride a moped.

Yours truly,
M. Pegley

P.S. I am not a Muppet either.
P.P.S. I have never heard of you—but then I only like Mozart and Bach.



Illustrated by Leora M. Sies

3 Bambury Court.
April 7th

DEAR MISS PYGMY (I suspect that I am misreading your signature, but find your handwriting, albeit full of character, a little difficult to decipher).

I am replying at once to your letter which you delivered as usual by hand, I suppose on your way to the hospital, so this will be waiting for you when you get home. I am so glad you're not a paid-up member of the Great Witch Society after all, and was almost equally relieved to learn that you are not the splendid Amazon from the local police. She was perfectly charming but I am only of medium height, and tend to be slightly intimidated by ladies over six foot tall. Why on earth didn't you say you were a nurse in the first place? I really am very sorry that you've been disturbed by my incessant strumming of the ivories, and promise that it won't happen again.

Yours sincerely,
Barnabas J. Brown

P.S. Oddly enough, I like Mozart and Bach.

1 Bambury Court.
April 11th

DEAR MR. BROWN,

Thank you for your letter of April 7th. It is extremely thoughtful of you to have stopped playing your piano altogether, but I must point out that there is no need for you to do anything so drastic. I don't require sixteen consecutive hours of sleep and, if you recall, my original request was merely for a moderate reduction in your practice periods. Also, at that time, I didn't know you were a professional musician, and it would obviously be unreasonable to expect you to abandon your playing completely. (To be perfectly honest, the sound of music has by now become so conspicuous by its absence that I am unable to sleep a wink.) Perhaps we could come to some satisfactory arrangement?

Yours sincerely,
M. PEGLEY

3 Bambury Court.
April 12th

DEAR MISS M. PEGLEY, (How ingenious of you to have used block letters! My next try would have been 'Pegleg' but I didn't think that could be right either.)

Does the initial 'M' stand perchance for 'Mary,' as in the horticulturally-inclined nursery-rhyme character? That was only a joke, Miss Pegley, honestly. I'm sure you aren't at all contrary. Indeed, it's now evident to me that you are basically a warm and caring person, and not a bit like my first impression of you. You don't have to worry that I'm neglecting my work. A friend is letting me use his place whenever he isn't there, which is more often than not nowadays. He has a very nice house in Greenwich—much better than my apartment .His piano is better than mine, too—but then he's a lot richer than I am. However, I digress. What I really wanted to ask you was whether, to mark the welcome cessation of hostilities, we might get together for a celebrity lunch—or dinner? I could happily fit you in with any time and place most convenient for you. Please let me know if you think this is a good idea.

Sincerely yours,
Barnabas J. Brown

P.S. My friends call me B.J. or Barney. What do your friends call you? To begin with I had you labelled as a 'Maud' or a 'Matilda,' but am now more inclined to see you as a 'Melissa' or a 'Marilyn'.

1 Bambury Court.
April 14th

DEAR MR. BROWN,

I'm afraid I must decline your kind invitation as my fiancé definitely wouldn't think it was a good idea. Thanks for the thought anyway.

Yours sincerely,
Marianne Pegley

P.S. I happened to mention your name to a colleague who is something of an aficionada, and she got quite excited and said you are extremely well-known in the contemporary music world. You must have thought me both ignorant and patronizing, and I do apologize.

3 Bambury Court.
April 14th (midnight)

DEAR MARIANNE, (you don't mind if I dispense with the formalities, do you? I feel we know each other well enough—and, besides, Marianne is such a lovely name.)

Although it's late I don't feel sleepy, so I shall reply to the letter I found waiting for me when I got home tonight. I should have guessed that you were spoken for. Most nurses seem to be snatched up to become child brides—and who shall blame the men who snatch them? I take it that the engagement was recent, so that it's not too late to offer felicitations?

Your reference to your colleague's gratifying appreciation of my work has boosted my morale no end (although I could wish you hadn't described her as an 'aficionada', as this makes me feel a little like a bull-fighter). I suppose you'll be getting married and moving away quite soon, so it will be a case of 'This correspondence must now cease'. I shall miss not only your letters, but your cat, with whom I have also become quite well acquainted since he first mysteriously managed to ascend from your patio to my balcony. I have deliberately refrained from feeding him as (1) I wouldn't want you to think I was trying to alienate his affections, and (2) he is obviously getting plenty to eat at home. However, as he has now become a regular night visitor I can only suppose that he enjoys my company as much as I enjoy his. I should have liked to afford him the courtesy of addressing him by his correct name—'Puss' or 'Tiddles' being far too undignified for so noble a creature—but you will probably feel that it doesn't much matter now that you'll shortly be taking him away. I hope you will both be very happy in your new home—and your husband, too, of course. All good wishes.

Sincerely,
B.J.

P.S. You won't forget to put butter on his paws as soon as you get there, will you? They say it stops them from straying. (Cats, I mean.)

1 Bambury Court.
April 15th

DEAR B.J.,

The noble creature's name is Joe. He started off as Johann Sebastian but that didn't last very long. Too much of a mouthful. Are you sure you don't mind him invading your apartment?

Thank you very much for your good wishes, which are greatly appreciated—although I should explain that Joe and I will not be folding our tents for some time. My fiancé is a mining engineer and still has to do six more months of a two-year contract in South America, so you see we haven't even begun to think about house-hunting yet. I hope your work is progressing well, and that the discovery that we're to remain neighbors for a while longer will not deter you from continuing to write to me now and again.

Kind regards,
Marianne

P.S. Please don't let Joe take advantage of your good nature. If you aren't firm he'll try to sleep across your feet all night.

3 Bambury Court.
April 15th (11 p.m.)

DEAR MARIANNE,

I couldn't be more delighted to know that you and Joe won't be moving on yet! I realize that this is a deplorably selfish reaction, and that I should be full of sympathy for your fiancé, who is doubtless straining at the leash by now in his anxiety to get home to you—but honesty compels me to feel it rather serves him right for not having whisked you off to the altar and out to South America with him. Clearly he must have had very good reasons for not doing so, and it's none of my business anyway, but I can't help wondering.

On a less impertinent note, I thank you for

(Continued on page 73)

A Heroine in History

JASMINE

By

Jordan Faith Kensington

"All the people!" Jasmine cried, rushing to the side of the boat, thrilled to be within reach of the land and filled with wonder at the things she saw. "Look at all the people!"

Jasmine had never seen Africans or Indians before. The port city that lay before her was alive with people who were as unusual as the garments they wore. Their clothes exploded with color, heightening the dark skins of the owners. Jasmine gasped at the incredible richness of the silks and brocades of the saris the Indian women wore. They contrasted sharply with the somber black enveloping the Arabian women. The latter were literally almost swalled in black—dreary lumps, Jasmine thought.

She touched her own once-flowing clothes and began to fan them out into a peacock display, for the moment forgetting her plight. As her fingers floated over her skirts she felt a tear in the fabric. Her eyes brought her back to reality. She was clad in clothes that were torn and soiled beyond repair. Jasmine felt teardrops spilling over, burning streaks of shame down her face as she stared at the remains of the only possessions she had been able to bring from that faraway place she had called home. There was nothing left of that now but memories.

Jasmine's nightmare began with intermittent attacks by raiders against her father's small principality. The lightning strikes terrorized everyone in the hamlet except Jasmine who, at seventeen, considered them mere moments of excitement in what was otherwise a dull existence for an overprotected and pampered princess. It was not until she secretly listened to the accounts of her father's advisors that she knew what the raiders were after and felt the fear herself.

Jasmine's grandfather had built their small palace on the edge of the river that led to the Black Sea. Over the years this area of Russia known as Circassia had been plagued by slave raiders who searched for the most valued addition to a sheik's harem: white women. Her grandfather, during his lifetime, had protected the local farmers and their families, but that was years ago. It was now 1827 and the intervening years of peace had been responsible for lulling Jasmine's father and the villagers into a false sense of security. They had abandoned their weapons and had almost no defense against the marauders.

At the last meeting with the village elders her father decided to remove the women from the village and hide them in the caves to the south where they would be safer and more easily defended. It was his last mistake.

Only two weeks later a horde of raiders attacked the village, burning and slicing their way through all defenses. A bloodied rider galloped to the caves with the news of her father's death and the deaths of many others. Jasmine listened in dry-eyed sorrow and terror. There was no time for tears.

"Go to the village," Jasmine shouted to the men guarding the caves. "You only protect us from the sun," she screamed. The other women took up her call. "We are hidden here and are safe," one shrieked. "Go and fight beside my brother. We can protect ourselves," they pleaded. "You have shown us what to do if we are attacked. Go to the village!" The men were eager to fight for their homes and needed little encouragement to leave their quiet post.

Less than one hour later the women sensed the raiders' approach. They felt the pounding in the heart of the earth before they actually saw the horsemen. Jasmine realized that the cave must have been watched for some time because the riders came at full gallop, unswerving in their drive. The women wasted no time. They shoved the children to the back of the caves and arranged themselves directly in front of the caves. Flaming torches were their only weapons.

The battle was over quickly. The valiant women were forced to use their torches outside the mouth of the caves to avoid letting the blinding smoke inside. The fact that the women were outside their shelters made it easy for the raiders to use whips, ropes, stones, and poles to knock the flaming weapons out of the defenders' hands. Many women had been badly burned, some had become huge torches themselves as their hair or clothing caught fire. Jasmine's torch was snared by a rope, but she refused to let go. She was dragged away from the cave and fought without let-up before her inevitable capture.

Jasmine and a dozen other chosen women were put on horses and driven southward. Her captors moved swiftly, making it impossible for Jasmine to see what was happening to the remaining women the raiders had kept at the caves. The horrors of the long journey across land and sea had become a memory she would never escape and now, as Jasmine stood on the dhow looking at Oman's capital city, her tears fell freely.

Beyond Muscat, which was also Oman's principal port, nothing could be seen but the vast lava deserts separating Oman's deserts from those of Arabia. For the women on the dhow there was no hope left, only a lifetime of unknowns to be endured. They faced a nightmare come true; they were destined for Arabian harems and would be nothing more than some sheik's chattel.

His appearance was as sudden as that of a genie from a bottle. Feet firmly planted and arms solidly crossed over his massive chest, a huge eunuch stood before the women. He looked more like an omnipotent spirit than an impotent male.

"You fate is in my hands," he said in a thick accent. "I am the sultan's right hand. To disobey me is to spit in the Sultan's face."

"I'd rather have the satisfaction of spitting directly in his face, thank you."

"Who speaks?" thundered the massive man.

Jasmine pushed forward and stood directly in front of the eunuch, matching his stance exactly. "I said that and I meant it."

"Good!" grunted the eunuch. "Take her to shore now and deliver her directly to the Sultan."

Jasmine controlled her fear. She stood her ground even as other eunuchs advanced, but she could not defend herself against overwhelming odds. Two of the lesser eunuchs pulled Jasmine aside, put her into the nearest dinghy and took her to shore.

The Sultan, a tall, bearded man, was pacing up and down the veranda that overlooked the sea. As he turned to greet the new arrivals, his black robe swirled open showing a snow-white garment underneath. Jasmine glanced at the red sash around his waist and saw the dagger's hilt sticking out of its folds.

"What have we here? A princess from Circassia, perhaps?" the Sultan laughed.

Hatred and humiliation boiled through Jasmine's veins. "You laugh at my state? What kind of an animal are you?" she demanded. She was bereft of fear; contempt fanned by fury ruled her. She prayed her next words would strike his soul: "May your mother live to experience that which I have just survived!"

The great man paused and smiled quietly. Lowering his gaze, he spoke warmly, "Ah, but she did. You see, my mother was captured and brought to Oman wearing clothes of your style. My father bought her and took her to his home and made me from her body. It was she who taught me your language, although I am afraid I speak it rather poorly."

Jasmine was silent, waiting for him to make the next move. She was not going to be fooled by his gentle pose and so far his intentions were not clear. She had much to consider before she could do battle with his new adversary.

The Arab Sultan studied her for a long moment and spoke quietly to his attendants. "Take her away and prepare her properly for our next meeting."

She was directed toward the inner courtyard. Just as they reached the door the Sultan called to her, "Wait a moment. What is your name?"

"Jasmine," she whispered, hoping he would not hear.

The attendants hurried her along toward the steep staircase across the inner courtyard.

On the second level of the palace Jasmine was left alone with a small, black African woman who eyed her curiously. The woman babbled to her, shaking her head as she touched Jasmine's tattered clothing. In her babbling language the black woman gestured Jasmine out of the room. Two male attendants fell into a matching stride beside the women and escorted them down the stairs to the courtyard where more curious people had assembled to catch sight of the stranger. Jasmine shuddered at their relentless stares. Feeling totally exposed and defenseless, she pulled herself tightly to the black woman's side and was gently received by slight arms that felt surprisingly strong.

Jasmine was hurried into the bathhouse in the corner of the courtyard. The attendants stood guard as the small woman shut the door, firmly blocking out the rude courtyard.

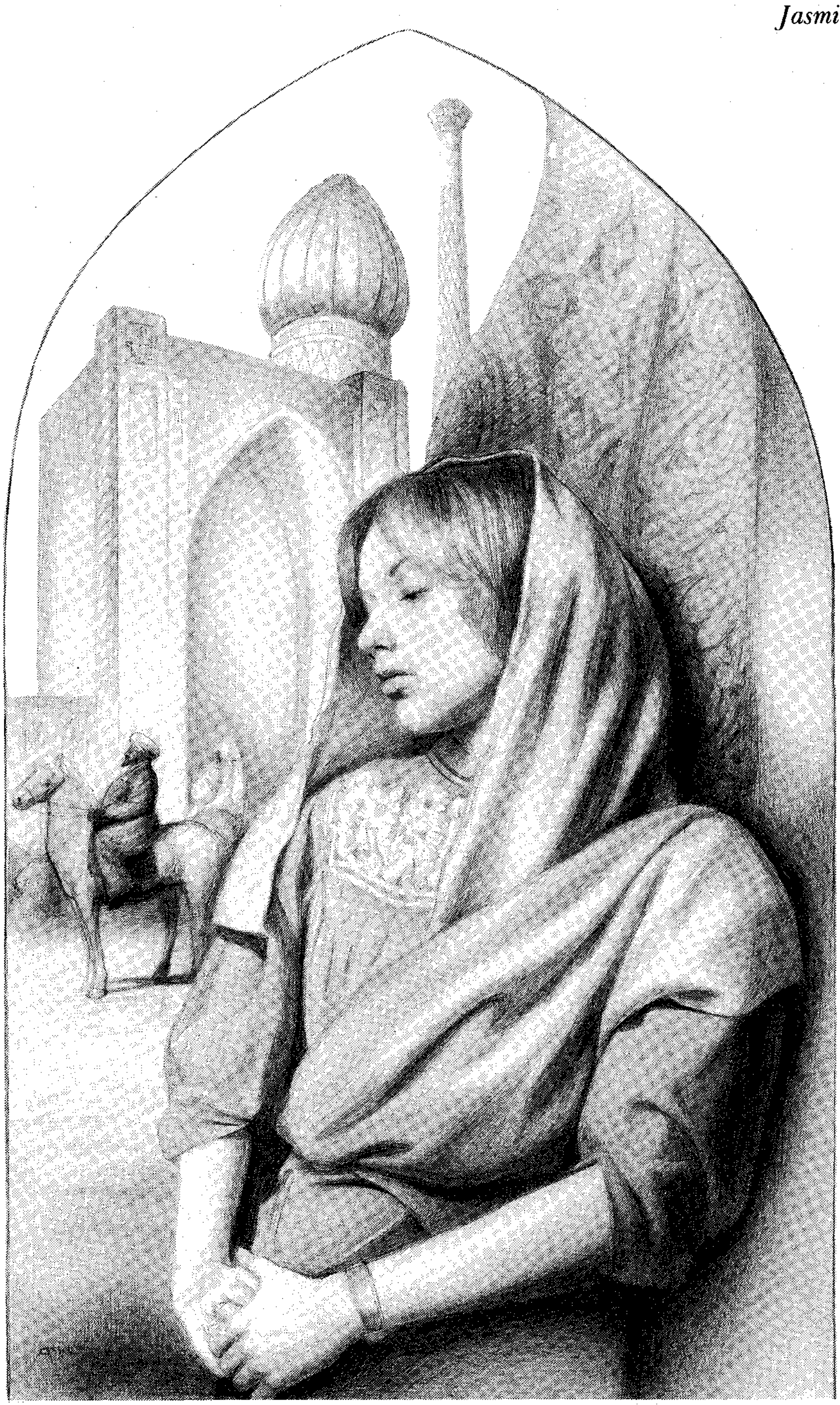
In the bathhouse Jasmine was washed and rinsed and washed again. Her hair was scrubbed. Trays of fruits, meats, and sauces appeared and her hunger sabotaged her doubts. Soon Jasmine was bolting down great quantities of food, slowing only when she reached for the luscious, ripe fruit which deserved careful savoring. Jasmine was then helped into the deep basin of hot water where she began to soak out her aches. An eerie sense of calm seeped into her pores and she realized, with apprehension, that she was feeling safer here than she had any place in the last few weeks. This strange palace was full of probing eyes and untold horrors, but it held a sense of sanctuary. In the room upstairs with the black woman she had felt safe. The guardian eunuchs added to this perception. In the deep tub her taut muscles released their tensions enough to give Jasmine a chance to concentrate, but she found her thoughts drifting away, the floating warmth eroding her fears.

The small woman was patting her gently, urging her softly to climb out and be dried. Jasmine moved slowly, relishing the pamperings of this black woman. The hot desert air dried her as effectively as the towel as the servant gently dabbed cool cream on Jasmine's sores and scratches.

While the African combed out Jasmine's full black hair, a long-limbed, grey-haired woman arrived carrying a tray of perfumes in beautiful bottles. The woman's natural beauty and grace belied her years and reminded Jasmine of her own mother. The two might have been mistaken for sisters had they been seen side by side. Jasmine felt an instant kindship with this woman and relaxed into near contentment as both women anointed Jasmine's skin with perfume.

The older woman spoke so softly that Jasmine was forced to listen carefully. The voice was so gentle that it was several months before Jasmine realized she understood this woman's speech. Although the dialect differed from her own, much was clear. Her calm, reassuring words flowed easily as the women dressed Jasmine in layers of brightly patterned clothes. The pantaloons, long-sleeved outer tunic, and head covering were more gaily decorated than any Jasmine had ever seen. The colors rioted before her eyes and brought a smile to her face. The women clucked happily and slipped her feet into ornate leather sandals. The older woman then held out a velvet-covered tray which she offered to Jasmine with a slight bow.

The velvet cloth was pulled aside to reveal a tray of jewelry beyond imagination. Diamonds, sapphires, and rubies glittered in their golden settings. The two women set to work fastening the necklaces, bracelets, armbands and anklets on Jasmine.



Illustrated by Steven Assel

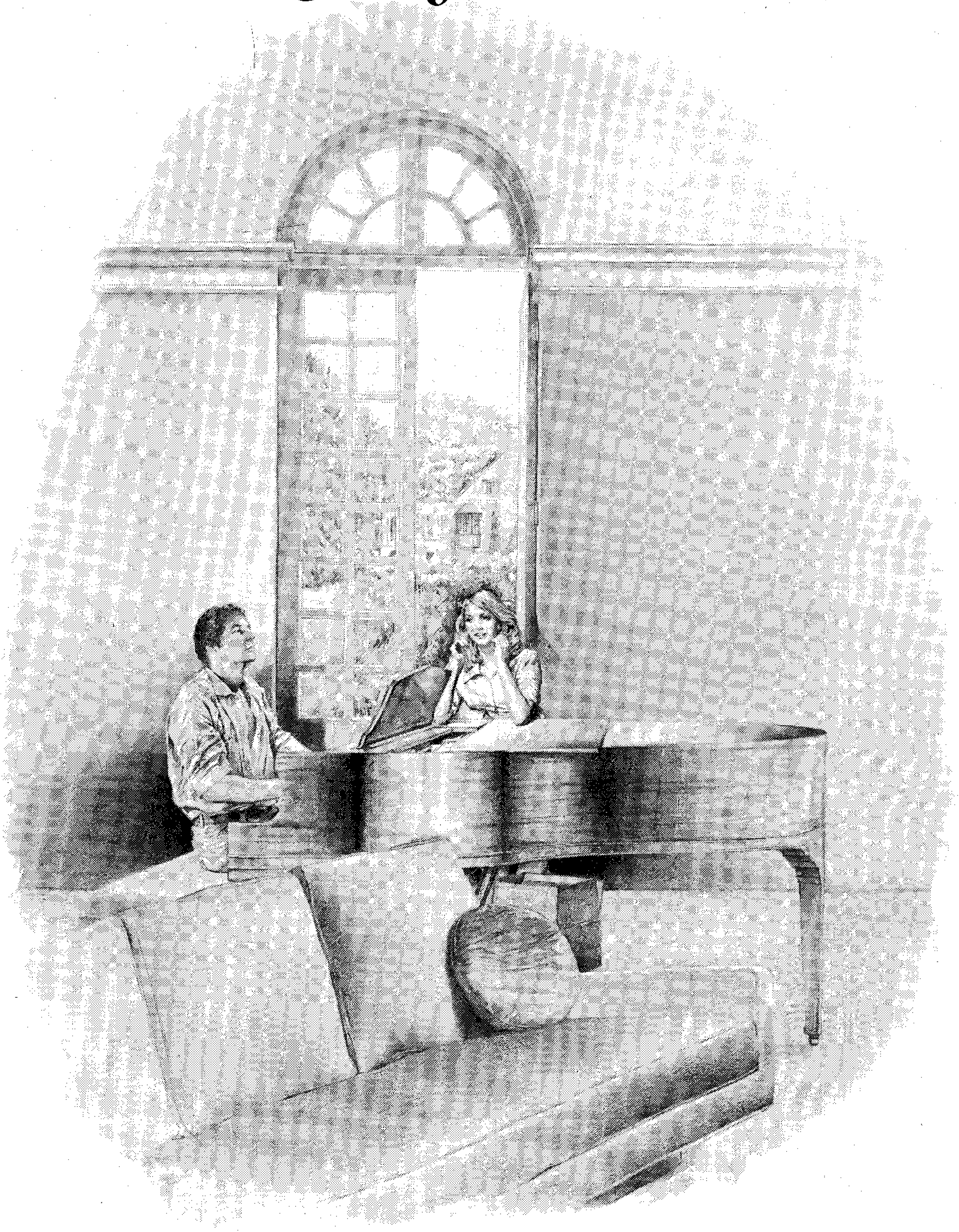
Jasmine stared into the mirrors that lined the room. The transformation was incredible. She had to look carefully at her face to be sure that the brightly clad, bejeweled figure was really the same bedraggled creature that had stepped off the dhow.

Slowly the two women approached her with their yards of black gauze and began to wrap Jasmine in it. Jasmine pushed them away and pulled the wrappings off. She appealed to the older woman to free her from the cloth, but both women sputtered about, fighting to cover her head and body. They shouted loudly and the two eunuchs charged in to restrain Jasmine and secure her within the folds of black.

Two attendants flanked the three women as they made their way through the crowded courtyard to the stairs. Everywhere there were eyes probing at Jasmine, trying to see through her wrappings. Jasmine found herself pulling the gauze more firmly around her, surprised by the defense it offered against those curious eyes. She stayed tight within the black cocoon as she was led through a maze of corridors. At the last door the women took the cloak off Jasmine and

(Continued on page 76)

A Memory of Summer



Illustrated by Gary Lang

BY

ANNE NEVILLE

A
CAMEO
NOVEL

Because it was still not a quarter to nine, and because it was a lovely, sunny June morning, Kate Grey was pushing her bike to school instead of suffering the usual mad, headlong flight down the main village street. Not that any street in Lynton Cross could, strictly speaking, be termed "main." This road was just a little wider than the others, and better surfaced. It ran the full length of the village from the entrance to the Manor House grounds to the dual carriageway three quarters of a mile away. It was bordered by everything of importance in Lynton Cross, the church and the Old Rectory, now up for sale; the school where Kate taught the youngest class; the village hall, sitting just inside the entrance to the playing field; and, of course,the pub.

On this pleasant June morning, Lynton Cross looked fresh and pretty and clean. Kate was thinking about the junior craft lesson that afternoon and how she was going to persuade Billy Johnson, a large, clumsy, though good-natured child of ten, from his determination to get out the woodwork bench in order to make his new baby sister a cradle, and about her date with John that evening. They were going to the theatre in Ledbridge. There was an excellent repertory company that changed its production every fortnight, and this week they were doing *Journey's End.* She was pleased because it was her turn to choose where they went on their Friday night out and John always chose the cinema. Since Kate really disliked most movies and John was fairly stuffy about the theatre, it meant one of them had to suffer every Friday. It sounded absurd, but this lack of give and take, which is supposed to ruin any good relationship, never struck either of them as being odd. Perhaps this was because her relationship with John was so comfortable in other ways that they were both reluctant to change it by making an issue of what was, after all, just one night a week.

During the junior craft lesson that afternoon, Maggie Ferguson, whose father had worked for the Reverend Jarvis Marks when he was rector of St. Luke's, told Kate the Old Rectory had been sold.

"My dad says he's very rich, Miss Grey. Well, he'd have to be, wouldn't he? It cost him eighty thousand pounds to buy it."

The Rectory had a good bit of land attached to it, but the house itself was in a very poor state of repair. Most people had been convinced that any prospective buyer could have knocked the price down by ten thousand at least. Whoever had bought it must have wanted it badly. Kate agreed that the new owner would indeed have to be rich. The Old Rectory was a large, rambling place, bigger even than the Manor House where Lord Rockwell still resided in feudal splendor. The Rectory was one of those places to which previous owners had added bits and pieces in a fairly haphazard way over the centuries. The oldest part was thought to be fourteenth-century and was the only remaining part of the priory that had stood on this spot before being destroyed by Henry VIII and his mob. The ruined abbey that stood close by on Rectory land was older still. The Rectory had been empty some years, certainly since before Kate came to teach at Lynton Cross three years earlier. The village children loved the house and its vast, overgrown grounds, particularly the abbey ruins and its surrounding woods, reputed to be haunted. There was the usual "grey lady," a young noblewoman forced behind convent walls by a tyrannical father who had vowed, when his life was spared during the Third Crusade, to present his next born child to God. She was walled up for some misdemeanor—probably to do with a man since the other ghost was a young man who hanged himself in the woods at about the same time. Kate had never met anyone who had actually seen or heard these apparitions, though many of the older inhabitants of Lynton Cross swore blind they knew someone who had.

"I suppose we'll have to keep out of the grounds now," Billy Johnson said, looking up from the shapeless lump of wet clay that he insisted was an ashtray.

"You shouldn't really go there anyway," Kate said, automatically slipping into her schoolteacher role. She found it relatively easy to look disapproving about almost anything; teaching had taught her this, even if it was usually a big act. Actually, Kate well understood the lure of the Rectory and at twenty-four was not so far from her own childhood that she had forgotten how delicious it was to wander over forbidden territory, especially when there was the added attraction of a couple of quite grisly, earthbound spirits. The Rectory was surrounded on three sides by woods of beech, horse chestnut, and oak, woods so overgrown that they were perfect for the building of secret dens, for the playing of cowboys and Indians, cops and robbers. No self-respecting child could be expected to keep away from the place for long.

Miss Ashton, the headmistress, had also heard about the sale of the Rectory. She joined Kate in the playground during afternoon break, and the two women stood in the sunshine and talked about it over cups of tea. Lynton Cross merited only a two-teacher school, which at present held thirty-seven pupils. Miss Ashton had taught the juniors for twenty years and knew the village and villagers well but Kate was still very much a newcomer after a mere three years, although she had learned to love Lynton Cross and the lifestyle it offered. After living in London all her life it was a real pleasure to move into the Dorset countryside, and she still found delight in the small attractive village and its surroundings. There were disadvantages, of course; Kate missed having the London theaters, libraries, and museums on her doorstep, and still had not gotten accustomed to the idea of everyone knowing everyone else's business. However, her life was quite uneventful and unlikely to offer food for village gossip.

As Miss Ashton talked about the Old Rectory, Kate glanced down at the ring that adorned the third finger of her left hand. It was a neat, unostentatious ring consisting of three diamonds; good but unexciting. And that, she thought, feeling a small pang of guilt even as she realized it, very accurately described John himself. But she reminded herself emphatically that that was exactly what she wanted—a good man who would make a good husband. Anything else was undesirable. Handsome, dashing men with something of the reformed rake in them were all very well in novels but uncomfortable and liable to bring only pain and heartache in real life. At this point her mind shuttered down hard on the subject; she had no desire to think about men who were handsome, dashing, and rakish.

"I gather he's some kind of writer," Miss Ashton was saying. Kate tried to pretend she had been paying attention. "He paid eighty thousand for the Rectory, you know, so he must be very successful. With the income tax rate so high a person would need to earn a great deal to be able to spend such an amount on a house."

It was unfortunate that the subject of writers had come up then. Kate's own particular ghost had been a writer. "Does he have a family?" she asked lightly, dismissing Matt McKinley firmly from her mind as she had learned to do quite readily after seven years. "The Rectory is a bit big for just one person."

"Perhaps he's one of those eccentric writers who likes to submerge himself in gloom and isolation," she said with a small laugh. "Actually, I know nothing more about the man. He never even came down to look at the house but bought it on the strength of a detailed description from the estate agent. Extensive repairs and redecoration will be necessary, no doubt."

She smiled and once more Kate thought how little like the traditional idea of a headmistress she was. Kate never ceased to feel fortunate in having obtained this job, especially when she had letters from college friends who were struggling against overcrowded classrooms, non-English-speaking immigrant children, and quite frightening degrees of delinquency in some city schools. Miss Ashton was in her middle fifties but was in no way staid or old-fashioned, running her small school with enthusiasm and delight. Though she had never married, Kate got the impression from various sources that she had been engaged and her fiance had died. She had not let this tragedy ruin her life but was a continuous source of understanding and sensible advice.

During the middle of the following week a small army of painters and decorators moved into the Old Rectory, and three local men were hired to make something of the immediate grounds that had been so sadly neglected over the last decade. This work was supervised by a stunning red-headed beauty who swept into the village one Saturday morning in a scarlet Lotus sports car and put up for the time being at the Rockwell Arms. She set the whole village agog in no time. The women disapproved of her, of course, particularly because she won the adoration of the local male populace by presenting herself nightly at the bar where she drank rum and cola and took their minds off their darts and dominoes. She was, it seemed, the Rectory owner's secretary.

Kate first became aware of her when she was standing with John one evening just outside the cottage. The powerful car roared past them and they were treated to the brief glimpse of long, reddish hair tied back by a chiffon scarf, and a hauntingly beautiful face that seemed to be smiling in a supercilious fashion. Her name, it transpired, was Alicia Allardyce, and that was enough of a mouthful for anyone to cope with, but she certainly looked like an "Alicia." A man's woman, Kate decided, and this was confirmed by a rare gleam of admiration that she caught in John's eyes. He certainly had never looked at *her* like that!

"No wonder the village pub is reported to be breaking all records with this month's takings!" Kate remarked with a grin.

John didn't so much as smile, but he hadn't the greatest sense of humor in the world. In fact, when that particular asset was handed out, he must have been at the back of the line. John was big and broad and tough-looking, the steady dependable type. He looked what he was, rather dull but safe—the sort of man who would always be the same.

Now, as John looked after the girl in the scarlet Lotus, Kate was surprised to find that hint of admiration in John's grey eyes. "Quite something, isn't she?" Kate remarked with another smile. "Do you think there's any truth in the rumor that she and her mysterious boss are having a mad, passionate affair even though he's a married man with a family?"

As Kate had no real interest in Alicia's private life, this was, of course, only a joke. But John's eyes glared slightly in a classic gesture of disapproval. "I don't think you, in your position, should spread such stories, Kate," he told her sternly.

"I was only kidding, John. Don't get uptight." She glanced at her watch. "I'd better go as I have to do that poster for the mothers' cake and cookie sale. See you on Sunday."

He nodded and bestowed a vague kiss on Kate's cheek. She stood by the gate watching him as he crossed the road, conscious of a faint sigh that was building up inside her. She hadn't particularly wanted to be grabbed and passionately kissed, but he could at least have shown a bit of emotion.

When Kate had first come to Lynton Cross she, like Alicia Allardyce, had been forced to rent a room in the pub, which wasn't very satisfactory but better than traveling to and from Ledbridge every day. Soon after, she met Valerie Peters, a local girl about her age who ran a little handicraft shop on the main road. The shop was actually the converted living room of a neat, thatched cottage, and at the back was a pottery where Val made most of the wares she sold. Val specialized in the kind of things visitors like—ashtrays, cream jugs, vases, and little figures—and though she was fond of saying she was "prostituting her art," the standard of her work was actually very high. Val was struggling to make ends meet when she met Kate, and she suggested that the newcomer move into her cottage. Kate was only too pleased to accept and Kate's share of the weekly rent helped her through the struggling period. By the time the business began doing well, they were such firm friends that there was no thought of Kate moving out.

They were perfect foils for each other. Kate had always been of a practical nature and found herself landed with the housekeeping of the cottage, including the payment of bills. Val never thought about such dreary matters. She was the sort of person who floats through life, never losing her temper or getting into a huff about anything. She lived in a daydream that consisted of her pottery and a man called Tom who taught art at Ledbridge comprehensive school. Tom was big, bumbling, and unconventional-looking but was actually very nice and he adored Val. Their love was touching, and almost unbelievably naïve; two children playing at house, spending more time holding hands and gazing into each other's eyes than showing their affection more demonstrably.

The following Monday Kate was up and making breakfast when Val came downstairs sleepily. "Have a good day yesterday?" she asked.

"Lovely, thanks," Kate replied automatically and without a lot of conviction. She spent Sundays with John at the Manor Farm, a regular occurrence that she hadn't quite got around to admitting she dreaded. The Nicolsons were a large and friendly family, and the farmhouse spilled over with brothers, sisters, and cousins, not to mention a host of cats and dogs. As an only child, Kate found this rather intimidating, and her Sundays invariably ended with a splitting headache and a bad case of nerves. Lately matters had been worsening as not very subtle hints were bandied back and forth that it was time John and Kate fixed their wedding date. John was willing enough to go ahead in the autumn, but something within Kate shied away from the thought of that final, irrevocable step.

"You missed all the fur," Val was saying as Kate crossed to the sink and rinsed out her breakfast things. "The whole village turned out *en masse* to watch the arrival at the Old Rectory of . . . wait for it! Three massive furniture vans all packed with the most fantastic furniture, mostly Queen Anne and Regency from what I could see, with one or two nice French pieces thrown in for good measure. No sooner had we all gotten an eyeful of this then the new owner, plus son, drove up in a blue Cadillac convertible!"

Kate was suitably impressed and showed it, asking, as a good teacher should, "How old was the son? Not that he's likely to come to us. Anyone who can afford to buy the Old Rectory isn't likely to send his son to the village school."

"He was about six or seven. But I wasn't really looking at the son. No red-blooded female is going to waste time looking at a mere child when there is the most gorgeous hunk of masculinity you ever saw in a month of Sundays there beside him."

This was accompanied by a lustful look as she rolled her eyes wildly. Kate laughed. "Really, Val, you should be ashamed of yourself. I'll tell Tom."

"He was there while I was drooling, and since he's been doing the same for the last week or so over Alicia Allardyce, I think I'm entitled to one small drool. Honestly, Kate, men like that shouldn't be allowed to wander round loose—over six feet tall, broad-shouldered, dark blond hair and a super suntan, too. Wow! Our Mr. McKinley is nothing less than a knockout!"

The laugh that had sprung to Kate's throat at Val's colorful description was cut off so sharply that it became instead a choking cough. If Val had turned on her and punched her in the stomach she couldn't have made her feel worse. Somehow Kate recovered from the coughing fit and stared at her reflection in the mirror. She had gone dead white.

"Who?" Kate managed to stammer.

"McKinley—that's his name," Val said, still not looking up. "I don't know his first name but Miss Gibson at the post office told me he had already had some mail and his initial is *M*. Malcolm, Mark, Michael, Martin . . ."

"Matthew," Kate put in without even realizing she had spoken until Val looked up, surprise on her good-natured face. When she saw Kate she straightened up and stared, her violet eyes worried but also curious.

"What's the matter? You're white as a sheet."

Kate ran her tongue over dry lips. "Val, are you sure?"

"That the man is M. McKinley? Yes, positive. Kate, you look terrible! Sit down before you fall down."

Kate shook her head; the sense of shock was wearing off now, and she forced a smile to her stiff face. "I'm all right" she whispered. "It was a bit of a shock, that's all."

"You know him, don't you?"

"I did . . . once."

"Want to tell me? You don't have to, but you know me—the soul of discretion." Her smile was warm and friendly as well as concerned, and Kate was tempted to pour it out there and then, but it was only a short-lived temptation. She had never told anyone and after seven years that habit was hard to break.

"Not now," she murmured, pulling herself together. "I have to think about it first . . . maybe later." She glanced at her watch. "Oh, lord, look at the time! It's almost nine o'clock!"

This fact was sufficient to jerk Kate back to the real world and sent her charging down the road toward school. She arrived at the gate with the last four stragglers just as the bell stopped ringing.

Kate got through the morning by immersing herself completely in her class; not a difficult thing to do when up against a class of boisterous, lively five-to-seven-year-olds. At lunchtime Miss Aston told her that Matt McKinley and his son had returned to London but would be down again when the decorators moved out. There was no sign of a Mrs. McKinley.

"I haven't been able to discover whether they are divorced or she is dead," she continued, totally unaware that her casual words were tearing Kate's already fragile feelings into a million pieces. What disturbed her most was that it shouldn't matter . . . but it did, very much. Not Matt suddenly reappearing in her life, not that he was quite likely married, not even her idle speculations about him and Alicia Allardyce, but that his son was almost seven years old. It didn't take the arithmetical knowledge of her young students to calculate that little sum. She had accused Matt of many things since, but she had never thought of him as being, then, a married man. Even though she had been only seventeen and it was all a long time ago, she felt betrayed and dirty, her emotions as raw as they had been at the end of that summer when she had discovered why a man like Matt, thirteen years her senior, experienced and devastatingly attractive, and rich into the bargain should give up a whole month of his time to a girl still at school.

That evening Kate was faced with the prospect of telling Valerie about Matt. It was no good hoping she would have forgotten about it; Kate's problem now was to make it less dramatic and, admittedly, less humiliating for herself. She had never confided in anyone about the events of that summer; when she returned home from Weymouth the wounds had just been too raw. Kate couldn't even tell her mother, although she was a remarkably understanding woman to whom Kate always carried those apparently heart-rending, desperate problems of her teenage years. She wanted no one to know what a gullible little idiot she had been. Even now she went hot with embarrassment at the thought of how she had flung herself at him, and shuddered at the idea of having to meet him again. But she had no doubt that it would happen. Lynton Cross was too small to avoid anyone for long.

It was Kate's week to do the cooking. She had just finished cooking supper when Val came in from the pottery still wearing her clay-covered smock. They chatted while she washed at the sink, and Kate poured a couple of glasses of sherry, but they had been sitting down only a few seconds before Val said, "Have you decided to unburden your soul about the gorgeous Mr. McKinley?"

Hearing his name spoken aloud set Kate's nerves on end, but she controlled herself and took her time chewing a mouthful of food. "It's nothing, really. I met him seven years ago. I was staying with an aunt in Weymouth for the whole of that summer. I met a boy called Peter McKinley. Matt was—is—his uncle."

"Uncle? But even now he can't be more than thirtyish."

Kate did a quick calculation. "He'll be thirty-seven. He was a good bit younger than Peter's father, Matt's brother. It was a large family with several brothers and sisters between them, but apart from a sister in America they were the only ones still alive."

"I see." Val looked consideringly at her. "Is that it? You were so peculiar when I mentioned his name that I thought there had been something between you."

"It was a surprise, hearing his name after all these years," Kate told her airily. "It brought back a lot to me. I became very fond of Peter. We even talked of marriage."

Val said "Oh" and as Kate had intended, immediately assumed Kate had been talking about Peter, not Matt. Kate had not wanted to lie and perhaps this was a lie by omission, but Kate didn't think that mattered.

However, Kate's punishment was subtle and painful. Val, now believing her to be unconcerned about Matt, launched into an enthusiastic list of suppositions concerning the relationship between Matt and his highly glamorous secretary. "After all, I can't see a female who looks like her and a guy looking like him, living in the same house together, working together as closely as boss and secretary do, without something happening." Kate was aware that Val was looking speculatively at her and kept her face lowered over her plate. "I wonder if there's a Mrs. McKinley in the offing somewhere."

"I haven't the faintest idea," Kate replied serenely but firmly, then changed the subject.

Lynton Cross was a lively village and, despite its small population and distance from the nearest large town, there was always plenty to do. It had its share of various societies and clubs. When Kate first came to Lynton Cross, she had been trapped into joining the Village Hall Committee and had not yet found a way of getting off it. Most of the year there was little to do, but during July came the annual event known as "Lynton Cross Week," designed to help raise funds for something special that was needed in the village. The week of activities culminated in a fête and Kate had been roped in to organize maypole dancing by the school children.

"I can see you doing things like this when you're old and grey," Val remarked one Saturday afternoon when Kate was practicing the steps of the maypole dance around the kitchen table. "You're getting to be a right old spinster schoolmarm," Valerie continued bluntly.

"Don't be silly. How can I be a spinster after I'm married to John?"

"I don't know why, but I can't somehow picture you married to John," she said, a comment that caused Kate to cease her prancing and look searchingly at her. Kate attempted to laugh off the unease that swept through her by waving her engagement ring at her and saying "What's this then?" But Kate suddenly realized that she couldn't see herself married to John either. Unbidden, a memory came back to her of what it was like in Matt's arms. He had had a wonderful way of entwining one hand in her hair, gripping the curls tightly so that if she moved it would hurt—not that she had ever wanted to move!—while he kissed her. She thought she had been frighteningly naïve, but the emotions he raised in her were frighteningly powerful. It was as well that he had plenty of willpower for she knew, all these years later, that she would have refused him nothing.

There had been times since when Kate had been able, without too much difficulty, to put these thoughts from her mind, sometimes for months on end, but with his sudden resurgence into her life, she found herself thinking often of those weeks in Weymouth when she was seventeen. She despised him now for what he had really been up to. Presumably he had found it easy enough to control his passions as they were simulated anyway. He had never wanted her; it had been all one big act to make her fall out of love with his nephew. Despite what she thought about such behavior, she still thought about him a good deal more than was good for her. Once she dreamed about him, a vague dream in which he had floated in a nebulous fashion just out of her reach, and the more she strove to reach him the faster he floated away from her. Kate had awakened from the dream with tears on her pillow.

Kate abandoned her maypole dancing, went outside, and lay in the sun. She closed her eyes and tried to put Matt McKinley out of her mind. She concentrated on devising some original suggestions she could put to the Village Hall Committee when it met next week. Somewhere at the back of her consciousness, Kate heard voices, high-pitched, though whispered and urgent. She opened one eye and surveyed the faces that were gravely watching her over the wall.

"What do you want?" Kate demanded, sitting up. "Don't you know it's rude to stare over garden walls?"

The children continued to stand there, mumbling softly together, nudging each other. Finally, little Amy Marsh spoke up. "It's our Ian, Miss Grey." She was an exceptionally bright, good-looking child of ten. Johnny, her brother, at her side as usual, was two years her junior and also highly intelligent. Kate had her doubts about "our Ian" who was in her class and three-quarters devil.

"What has he done now?" Kate asked with resignation.

"He's up that big oak tree over by the abbey," Johnny told Kate, his eyes huge. "He went up after a cat."

"And he got the cat," Amy piped up. "But now he can't get down." She drew in a noisy lungful of air and let out a roar along with a rush of tears, yelling to the world in general that she didn't want Ian to stay up there forever.

That idea sounded fairly desirable to Kate, but she agreed to go along with them and see about bringing Ian back to solid ground. With Amy's hand in hers, she followed Johnny down the road and through the small gate that led into the Rectory grounds. The children led her without hesitation through narrow, secret paths until they approached a clearing where the first part of the abbey ruins could be seen; a long, grey stone wall about three feet high and much overgrown with ivy and brambles. In the center of this clearing was an enormous oak tree with branches that swept close to the ground, and up among the higher branches, a very, very long way up, perched Ian Marsh clutching a half-grown Siamese kitten. Completely undaunted by his predicament, Ian yelled, "Hiya, Miss Grey. You come to get me down?"

"I've a good mind to leave you up there," Kate said forbiddingly. "If you got up there, why can't you get down?"

"I can but not with the cat," he returned cheerfully. "I'd have to let it go and then it would only climb higher."

"If we could just get the kitten, Miss

Grey," Amy suggested, "I expect Ian could climb down on his own."

"Yes . . . well . . . all right." Kate muttered doubtfully, convinced that her tree-climbing days were truly over. However, she had been pretty nimble once, able to shin up a tree with the best of 'em, and this tree looked relatively easy. She was suitably dressed anyway, even if her jeans *were* a bit tight. She grabbed a strong branch and hauled herself up. After that it wasn't too difficult, and she managed quite well until she came to Ian. Kate saw then that the branch on which he was astride would never take both their weights. Ian just sat there grinning, the cat held firmly to his chest. It was a pure-bred sealpoint Siamese that spat spitefully as Kate approached and glared at her from baleful blue eyes.

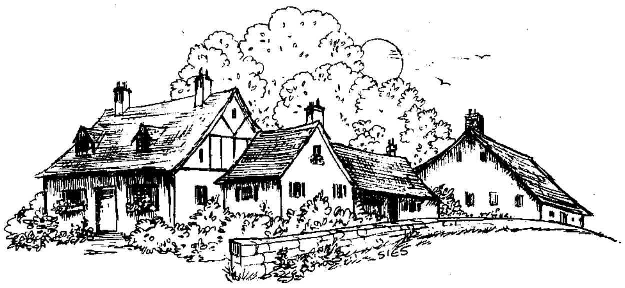
"I don't think I can get any closer, Ian," Kate told him. "Could you move up and then hand the cat to me?"

Ian leaned toward her, holding the animal out as far as he could with two hands, but she was unable to grip it and caught hold of a small branch above her head with her left hand so that she was able to lean perilously across to Ian. This, of course, was a mistake, for now Kate was offered a clear view of the ground far below her, with Amy and Johnny's foreshortened figures gazing up at her. As she looked, they all seemed to sway sickeningly as she closed her eyes for a brief, alarming moment, at the same time speaking firmly to herself. Kate had never before suffered a fear of heights, and this was no time to be getting vertigo. She felt soft fur brush against her outstretched hand and clasped her fingers firmly around the kitten's middle, at the same time pulling at the overhead branch to haul herself upright. Mission accomplished. But the creature yowled as only a Siamese can and sank every one of its needle-sharp claws and teeth firmly into Kate's hand. Her own yell equalled the cat's. She released her grip, but the kitten clung there by its claws, shooting red-hot needles into Kate's flesh. Forgetting the risk of perching up there without a firm handhold, she grabbed the cat by the scruff of its neck; as abruptly as it had caught hold, it released her. Ian Marsh and Kate sat there watching as it leaped down the tree and streaked away across the clearing and into the undergrowth.

"I reckon it could've got down on its own after all," Ian said cheerfully and unrepentantly. "Never mind. It was a good climb, eh? Did it hurt you, Miss Grey?"

"No," she said. "It's all right. Can you get down now, Ian?"

"Sure," he said and proceeded to swing over arm with the ease of his hero, Tarzan, to the ground. He even accompanied the action with a very realistic, Tarzan-like bellow of victory, which may have attracted the attention of the Rectory's new owner who chose that moment to appear from the direction of the house, saying, "What's going on here? Don't you children know you're trespassing?"



To the credit of the Marsh children, they didn't cut and run, as they easily could have, but stood their ground as Matt stalked over to them. Even though Kate felt most peculiar, as much because of his sudden appearance as from the really excruciating pain in her hand, which felt twice its normal size, and was already throbbing, she thought how well being a landowner suited him. He had just the right sort of attitude. He stood before the children, feet apart and planted firmly on the ground, hands on hips, and said abruptly, "Well? You've got tongues, haven't you?"

"Yes, sir," Amy replied politely, and involuntarily glanced up into the tree. Kate's breath caught on a gasp of dismay. Some time ago, she had accepted the fact that she would eventually come face to face with Matt. In a village the size of Lynton Cross this was inevitable. But, having been forewarned of his coming, Kate could at least arm herself with a show of indifference. She could be adult, disdainful, distant, and cooly polite. At that point she just didn't appreciate the irony of the cruel joke fate had played on her. Matt said, "Oh, there are more of you, are there?" and he turned his face upward and looked directly at Kate.

Not by the smallest flicker of an eye did he indicate whether or not he recognized Kate and it seemed more than likely that he did not. She had always gone to almost absurd lengths to appear before him only in pretty, feminine clothes; her hair was vigorously brushed, her face carefully made up. Now she felt and looked hot and disheveled, probably hardly older than the children in her old jeans and shirt. As Matt and Kate stared at each other through the foliage, Amy explained, "Our Ian went up the tree to rescue a kitten and then Miss Grey had to go up to rescue *him.*"

"I see. Can't you get down?" he asked. Kate was fairly certain he found her prediament extremely amusing.

"Of course I can!" she snapped, pulling dignity and shattered pride together.

"Then I suggest you do so at once, because that branch doesn't look too safe."

It didn't feel all that safe either. Kate shifted around so that both legs were on the same side of the branch and felt about until her toes encountered another foothold. She muttered a silent good-bye to the comparative safety of her perch and trusted her weight to the lower branch, at the same time grabbing the one she had been sitting on with both hands. Momentarily Kate had forgotten what the kitten had done to her right hand, but now a hundred sharp pinpricks of pain screamed through her, bringing an involuntary cry to her lips. She closed her eyes, but that was a mistake for when she opened them again the whole world seemed to swing around her. Kate knew that in another moment she would go crashing to the ground.

Matt McKinley shinned up that tree so swiftly that even Ian, not easily impressed by adult behavior, was filled with unconditional admiration. Kate knew nothing of this; she knew only that within seconds of the dizziness overwhelming her, she had been grasped firmly around the waist and a calm, steadying voice was saying, "Hang on to me." Then she was swung into space. Obediently Kate clung around his neck, aware as she did so of a great sense of strength and safeness, but before she could properly assimilate those sensations she was on her feet again, standing there before the children, and all of them were staring at her hand.

"What in God's name have you done?" Matt demanded in a low voice that might even have been concerned.

"It was the cat!" Ian yelled. "Yuk, Miss Grey. It's 'horrible!"

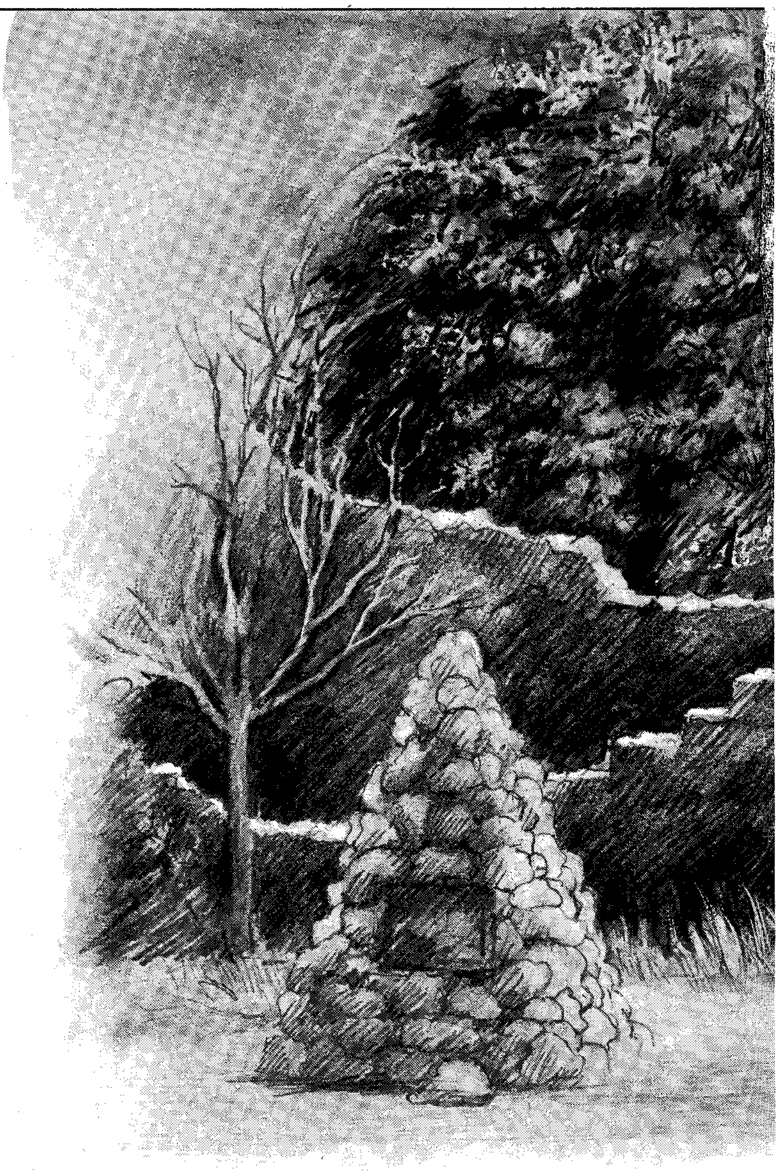
It was, too. There was hardly a square inch of skin not decorated with at least

(Continued on page 78)

THE EMERALD

Praying she would allow my husband to live,
I said, "Rest, Lady Margaret, and let
peace come to this glen."

A short story by Vera Henry



When I first showed my Great Aunt Fiona the engagement ring Doug Campbell had just given me, she turned pale and shuddered.

The ring was a magnificent emerald in an unusual setting. It was an heirloom Doug's family had brought from Scotland. It looked as if it had been made for my hand.

"Take it off right away, Christie," Aunt Fiora begged. "You must not wear it!"

I looked at the oil painting above the fireplace of the ruins of Ellerslie Castle where my ancestors were treacherously murdered by Rory Campbell and his men. The painting is dark and yellowed with age, but Aunt Fiona refuses to have it cleaned. She is not about to erase two hundred and fifty years of her family history.

"Aunt Fiona," I scolded. "You promised you would forget that old feud. My Doug isn't responsible for something that happened centuries ago in the Scottish Highlands."

"He's a bonnie lad," Aunt Fiona admitted. "He must take after his mother's family. It isn't Doug—it's the ring. There is a curse upon it."

Aunt Fiona was born with a cowl. She believes she has the gift of second sight. It's pure superstition, of course, but it was sometimes uncanny the things she seemed to know.

I put my arms around her thin, trembling shoulders. Ordinarily she is staunch as an oak. She wears her wrinkles with an air. Since my parents were killed in an accident, she is all the family I have.

"Darling," I said, "Doug and I love each other. Whatever may have happened in the past has been wiped out by that love."

She didn't seem to hear me. She went over to stand below the painting. "We never forget and we never forgive," she said.

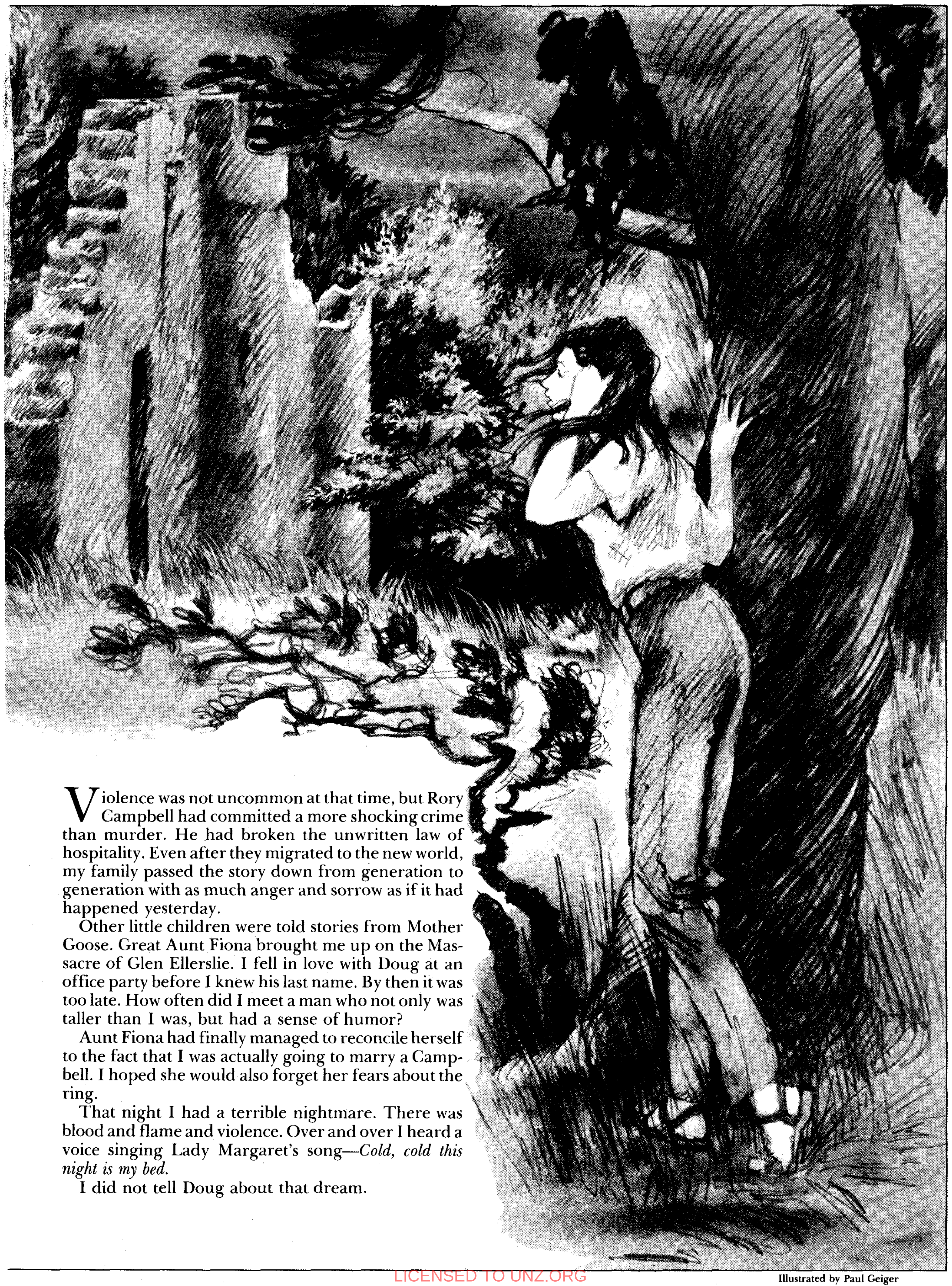
Long ago, Alisdair, chief of the Clan MacAilen, and Rory Campbell, courted the Lady Margaret. She married Alisdair, and from that time on the MacAilens and the Campbells were enemies.

On a stormy winter night, Rory Campbell and a group of his followers came to the gates of Ellerslie Castle and asked shelter, claiming to have become lost during a hunt. Among the Scots it was a proud tradition that even an enemy must be treated with the hospitality offered a clansman.

Rory and his men were given a generous welcome. A banquet was held in their honor. At the Cielidh the Lady Margaret, lovelier than ever, sang this ballad:

Is fuer, fuer an nochd mo leaba
(Cold, cold this night is my bed)

When she had finished, Rory Campbell signaled his men and they fell upon their trusting hosts. He himself murdered the Chief, Alisdair. When he attempted to carry off the Lady Margaret, she seized her husband's unsheathed dirk and plunged it into her own heart.



Violence was not uncommon at that time, but Rory Campbell had committed a more shocking crime than murder. He had broken the unwritten law of hospitality. Even after they migrated to the new world, my family passed the story down from generation to generation with as much anger and sorrow as if it had happened yesterday.

Other little children were told stories from Mother Goose. Great Aunt Fiona brought me up on the Massacre of Glen Ellerslie. I fell in love with Doug at an office party before I knew his last name. By then it was too late. How often did I meet a man who not only was taller than I was, but had a sense of humor?

Aunt Fiona had finally managed to reconcile herself to the fact that I was actually going to marry a Campbell. I hoped she would also forget her fears about the ring.

That night I had a terrible nightmare. There was blood and flame and violence. Over and over I heard a voice singing Lady Margaret's song—*Cold, cold this night is my bed.*

I did not tell Doug about that dream.

Illustrated by Paul Geiger

We had a small wedding in the living room of Aunt Fiona's pleasant Toronto home. For the occasion she tactfully removed the painting of the ruins of Ellerslie Castle.

Doug's parents came from their retirement home in British Columbia. Much to my relief, Aunt Fiona got along well with them since all three found mutual interests in backgammon, African violets, and Yoga.

We had intended to spend our honeymoon in Spain, but the rain fell not only on the plain, but everyplace else. The churches, museums, and even our hotel room were clammy and uncomfortable.

In spite of weather like this, Doug had a way of sounding as if something great was going to happen. "How would you like to fly up to Scotland?" he asked. "We could rent a car and bring Aunt Fiona back some heather from her beloved Ellerslie."

I reminded him that Campbells might not be exactly popular in Glen Ellerslie.

He laughed at that. "Honey, that story sounds like the plot of an old opera. You know how your Aunt Fiona likes to dramatize. I told you no one in my family ever heard that bit of history."

He was probably right. People don't hold grudges for over two hundred years. Besides, everyone always liked Doug. That warm friendly smile of his had won even Great Aunt Fiona. I doubted he would have trouble with the rest of the MacAilen clan.

At first it seemed as if the trip to Scotland was a happy idea. The weather was fine. I was delighted with the magnificence of the scenery and the courtesy of the people. I was a loyal American. This was a land I had never seen before, yet I felt as if I had come home. This was where it all began. The sorrows, the triumphs, the feuds of this small country were a part of my blood.

It was not until we were coming near Glen Ellerslie that my mood, like the weather, began to change. The narrow rutted road wound like a snake through the mountains. Twisted shrubs reached greedy, clutching hands toward our small car. Far, far below the unprotected ledge, I could see the tops of the trees. If a car ever went over the bank it would vanish into those green jaws forever.

Doug was unusually silent. Ordinarily he had tremendous energy and enthusiasm, but now his face seemed pale. There were beads of sweat on his forehead, although the day had begun to turn cool.

He pulled to the side of the narrow road. "I'm sorry, honey. I think I must have picked up some kind of flu bug. Would you mind driving?"

Almost as soon as we had changed places, he fell asleep. He was shivering so, I took off my blue raincoat to cover him. A year ago I had not even known Doug existed. Now if anything ever happened to him, I would not want to live.

Ordinarily I have a tendency to drive too fast, but now I was cautious. As soon as we reached the village I would insist that Doug see a doctor.

A heavy fog rose without warning so that I could barely see. I almost ran the car over the cliff bank, thinking that the swirl of mist was a woman in a long white gown standing in the middle of the road.

Surprisingly, as the way led down deeper into the glen, the fog lifted. By the roadside I saw the sign:

GLEN ELLERSLIE
DOGS AND CAMPBELLS
NOT WELCOME

Shocked, I looked at Doug but he was still asleep, his breath coming in harsh gasps.

Now I could see the ruins of Ellerslie Castle looming angrily over the village. Above us on all sides the black mountains rose like a trap. I had a strange feeling as if I were in the middle of a nightmare time machine. Every instinct warned me that now, before it was too late, I should turn back.

Just this side of the village there was a large stone house, staunch as a fortress but with well-tended flower beds. A modern sign said DR. IAN MacAILEN. A kinsman, though after seeing that unfriendly town sign, pride would not let me trade on the honor.

The doctor was tall and tweed-clad with a healthy, ruddy complexion. There was a strong family resemblance. He looked as my father might have looked if he had been a native of this village instead of a big city insurance executive.

"I'm Mrs. Douglas Campbell," I stammered. "My husband became suddenly ill while we were on our way here. I can't seem to waken him."

At that mention of that name, his pleasant face became a mask though his voice was still courteous. "If you will bring the car around to the side entrance, my gardener will help me get the patient inside."

This wing of the house looked like an efficient, modern clinic. "I think you will find the waiting room comfortable," Dr. MacAilen said. "This will take a little time."

The waiting room was empty. The big leather chairs were inviting and warm. The magazines seemed intended for fishermen. The plant-filled window faced the ruins of Ellerslie Castle. Even seen from here, it was overwhelming.

At last a brisk, neat little woman in a white uniform bustled through the hall door. "I'm Mrs. Muir, the doctor's nurse," she told me. "The doctor says you can see your husband now."

I had a wretched headache, so I had taken off the scarf that held back my hair. As I stood up it fell about my shoulders.

I'm proud of my hair. It's thick and red-gold. Most people think it is my best feature. Mrs. Muir looked at it with as much horror as if it had been Medusa's snakes. Hand over her mouth, she backed away and vanished, with a last terrified glance over her shoulder.

Was the woman daft? What kind of place was this?

My darling, still unconscious, was lying in a hospital bed in a small, immaculate room. When I bent to kiss him, his skin felt hot and dry.

"He is a very sick man," the doctor said. "The nearest hospital is thirty miles away over very rough roads. I do not advise trying to move him tonight."

I felt hopeless. The doctor certainly seemed capable, but I had a ridiculous feeling something dark and dangeorus lurked in this room.

"May I stay with him?" I asked.

He shook his head. "The office is closed for the day. I'll stay with him myself." Then he added something strange. "I promise you that if it is humanly possible no harm will come to him while he is under my roof."

I had never in my life felt so completely alone.

"Since there is no inn at the village, I will ask Mrs. Muir to show you to a spare room," the doctor said.

"I couldn't intrude—" I began.

"You are a welcome guest," he said in that same expressionless voice.

Had the old Chief Alisdair said those same hospitable words to his enemy, the Campbell, when he asked for shelter?

There was nothing I could do for Doug. I didn't care to stay here any longer than necessary under Mrs. Muir's suspicious eyes. I would take a walk and try to sort out my thoughts.

If Doug had been with me I would have been charmed with the cobblestone streets and the picturesque shops and homes of the village. The people, however, were not as friendly as those in the other places in the Highland where we had stopped.

Since I'm tall and red-headed, I'm used to people staring at me. This was different. Passersby glanced in my direction with dismay and fear, then quickly moved as far away as possible.

I grew up in a big city. There were districts where it is not safe to walk. Never, not even in the inner city, had I encountered the hostility and menace I felt in this peaceful-looking village.

My headache was growing worse. I stopped in a charming tea room with crisp white curtains and flower-filled window boxes. The scones were delicious. The waitress sloshed my tea in her anxiety to get away from me.

That did it. I had had quite enough of this quaint little place. Just as soon as possible Doug and I would leave.

I followed the path that led up to the ruins of Ellerslie Castle. Seen this close, it was even more desolate and frightening. The crumbled walls had defied the softening touch of time as if deliberately keeping alive the memory of a terrible wrong. Even the once bloodstained ground was barren. Not as much as a weed grew there.

A stone cairn marked the grave of the Lady Margaret. The bronze tablet read

MURDERED BY CAMPBELL
TREACHERY.

"We never forget and we never forgive," my great Aunt Fiona had said. She had known her village well.

There were tears in my eyes as I knelt by the grave. Lady Margaret had been about my own age. She had loved and she could not live without that love.

Farther down the slope I found heather blooming. I carried the flowers up to her grave.

Throwing back my head, I sang her song:

Cold, cold this night is my bed.
The warm pulse of my love will
not stir—

The wind blew my hair into wild disorder. I looked up at the black peaks of Kaurug Eilde. It was said to be impassable yet on that terrible night clansmen who had escaped the holocaust made their way over it. Some of them perished, but others bore to safety, wrapped warm in the MacAilen tartan, their new hereditary Chief, the infant son of Margaret and Alisdair.

"They could not destroy us," I thought with fierce pride. "We will have revenge."

Shocked, I seemed to come out of a dream. What was I thinking about? I was not a part of those bloodstained long-ago events. I was married to a Campbell. The children Doug and I hoped to have would carry his blood as well as mine.

Feeling guilty as if somehow I had betrayed my husband, I hurried back to him.

The doctor was seated by Doug's bed, looking rather tired, "There is no change," he said. "He does not seem to be responding to treatment as I had hoped."

Again I had a sense of terror.

That fine dark hair of Doug's had the most endearing way of falling down on his forehead. As I brushed it back, the emerald on my ring shone like the eye of a living animal.

I hesitated. "Doctor, are the villagers always this unfriendly to strangers, or is it because I am married to a Campbell?"

"Come with me," he said.

The door he opened led to a handsome drawing room, rich with books and the gleam of well-polished antique furniture. The portrait over the fireplace held me motionless. It was of a young woman wearing an elegant, old-fashioned blue ball gown. Both the face and the long red-gold hair were overwhelmingly familiar. They looked back at me each day from my own mirror.

"The Lady Margaret?" I managed to ask. "I—I was a MacAilen before my marriage."

He nodded. "I was sure of that, yet you married a Campbell."

He sounded as reproachful as great Aunt Fiona.

"Your face, combined with the Campbell name, has the villagers frightened and confused. They believe that the spirit of Lady Margaret still haunts the castle ruins crying for revenge. Those who hear her song say it is a warning."

"Even after all these years the villagers still hate?" I asked.

"This glen is isolated. Her story has been told and retold a thousand times on long, lonely evenings. Even if we tried to forget, there are the ruins of the castle to remind us."

"You are an educated man," I persisted. "Do you believe in her ghost?"

"My late wife was a firm believer. So is Mrs. Muir. As a doctor I know there are many things for which there is no scientific explanation. Let us say, I do not disbelieve."

Something about the portrait bothered me. "The ring," I cried. "How can she be wearing my ring? It is an heirloom from my husband's family."

Now his face was hard and cold. "As the Lady Margaret lay dying, Rory Campbell tore the emerald from her finger."

I felt sick. No wonder Doug's family had preferred to forget this bit of their past.

We were interrupted by an excited male voice shouting to Mrs. Muir in the waiting room. "It's an omen, I tell you, woman! There'll be trouble in the glen if a Campbell is allowed to stay. I myself saw her by the cairn, beautiful as an angel and singing so it would chill your heart."

"It was me he heard," I confessed to the doctor. "Great Aunt Fiona taught me the song."

"I'll have Mrs. Muir take you up the backstairs to your room," the doctor said quickly. "If poor old Angus sees you now, it will scare him out of the remains of his drunken wits."

I followed Mrs. Muir's disapproving figure up the stairs to one of the most beautiful bedrooms I have ever seen. The view through the window of the old castle ruins was almost the duplicate of Aunt Fiona's painting.

A terrified young maid silently brought me a handsome dinner tray of smoked salmon and fresh strawberries with cream so rich it held the shape of a spoon. I did not want to offend my host so I tried hard to choke it down.

I considered taking off the emerald ring as I usually did at night. Almost as a gesture of defiance, I left it on. If its past was dark, I as well as Doug, shared it.

Now the storm that had threatened all day fell upon the glen with savage fury. The lights flickered and went out. I lit one of the candles on the fireplace mantle.

A storm in the city can be an inconvenience, but it does not have the personal quality this storm seemed to have. It tore at the glen like an animal, claw-

(Continued on page 74)

The Perfect Spring

All that autumn he worked feverishly, driven by some unseen demon, until she ached with love for him crying quietly to herself as she saw the pale face and the now thin frame driving itself, a time bomb near its explosion.

All day, every day, he cleared and trimmed, cut and tended, tidied and raked, attacking the weeds with anger, pursuing each leaf with a frantic need. It was as though he wanted to make the garden that autumn a perfect setting to hold some jewel he had yet to reveal.

He spent hours out in the garden, without a break, coming in pale and near exhaustion each evening, but shining with some private satisfaction. Next morning he was out there again as though a spring in him had been tightly wound, giving him a lifetime of effort to cream into the small space ahead.

Often she wanted to slow him down, but only once did she beg him to rest. He replied softly so that she could feel his love flowing towards her, a cloud from his frail and final life.

This year he seemed to take the planting particularly seriously, continually looking up advice in his gardening books, then working his bulbs and plants gingerly into the carefully prepared soil, as though he were frightened to disturb some sweet pattern in his mind.

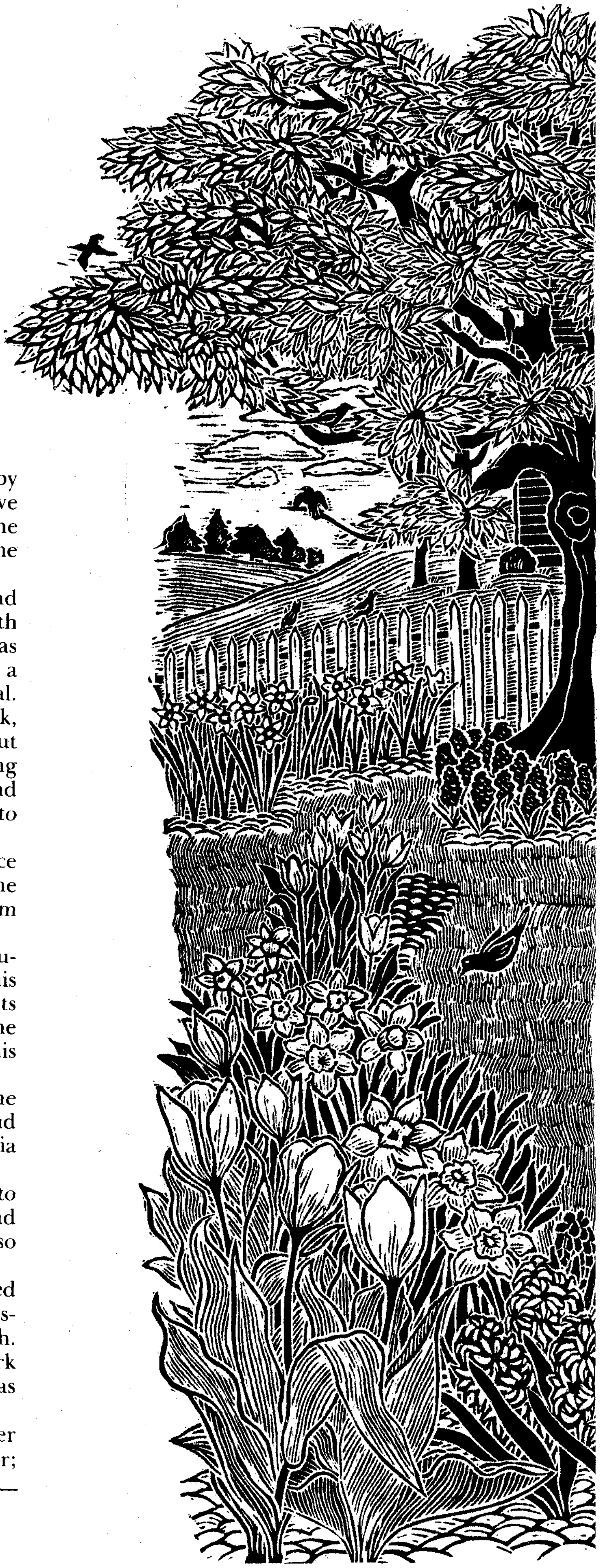
Once, when she was asking him how it was going, he interrupted her with some of the old spirit that had first attracted her to him, like a butterfly to a buddleia tree.

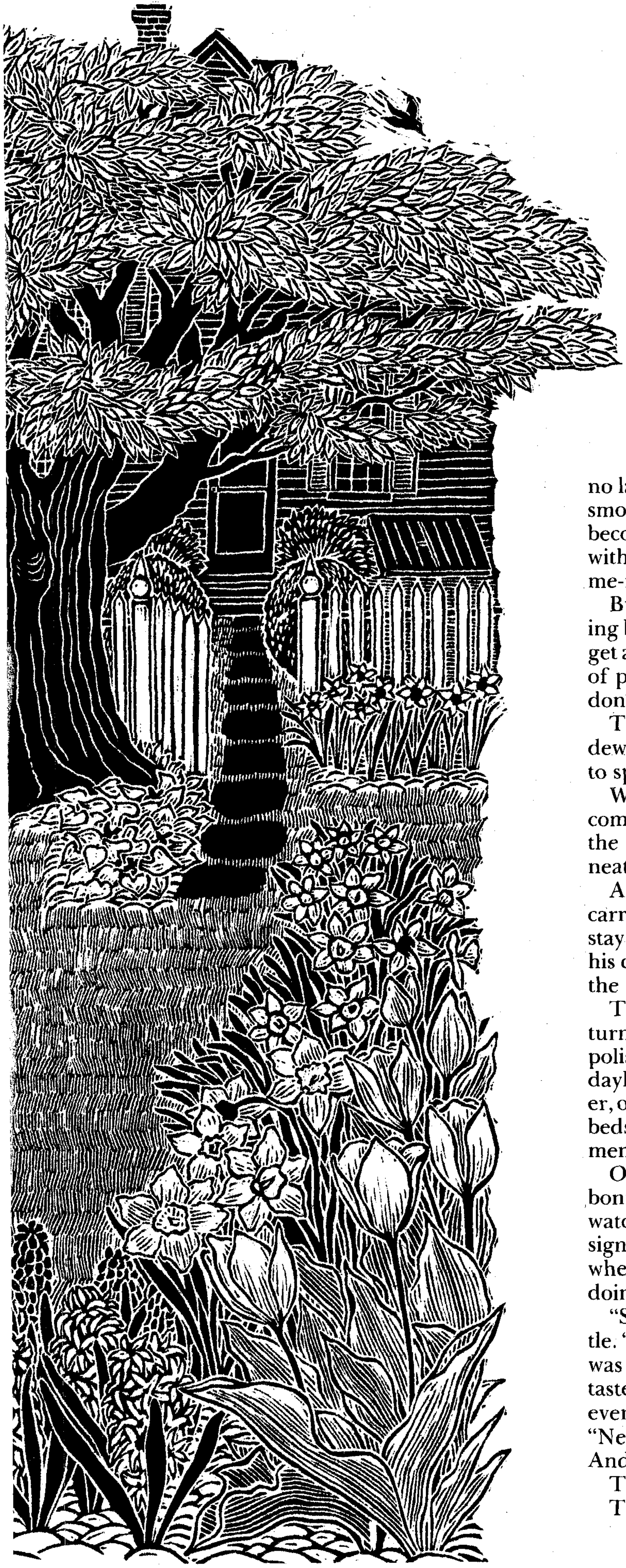
"Now I've the time," he had explained, "I'm going to give us a perfect spring. You'll see." His certainty had choked her and she had had to turn her head away so that he should not see her pain.

When he had finished with the flower beds he turned to the lawn, and was immediately more involved, cosseting the grass through the last of the October warmth. Sometimes he went down on his bony knees to work and seemed locked down there for so long that she was frightened he would not get up again.

By late November the garden was as it had never been before. No withered leaf was allowed to linger;

A short story by Mary Ward





He had the time, he told her, to give her the gift of a lifetime.

no late weed allowed to flourish. Each flower bed was smooth and planted, the wall flowers scheduled to become soldiers of delight, marching upon the spring with their scent blowing trumpets above the forget-me-nots and the nodding heads of daffodils.

By comparison, the roses were spare and trim, having been pruned early. "Why?" she asked him, only to get a too-casual shrug in return. "Experimenting. Lots of people do it this way." But she knew why he had done it.

The lawn, by now, was perfect, shining under the dew and the early frosts like some green plate washed to sparkle, its edges hand-cut to an exquisite pattern.

When December came he took to pottering in the comparative warmth of the greenhouse, bringing to it the same obsessive order. Soon the seed trays were neatly full, the glass clear for the sun.

At Christmas he still had that built-in look of life to carry him forward. By now it was too cold for him to stay in the greenhouse and he had taken to sitting in his chair, an unread book on his lap, his eyes fixed on the perfection he had prepared.

Then for a few days in the new year the weather turned mild, almost as if to give him a last chance to polish up his work. He was out in the garden as long as daylight lasted, tidying around like a prim housekeeper, or like some doctor moving calmly among the flower beds, nursing everything to life with his encouragement and skill.

On one of the days, the uncharacteristically, he lit a bonfire and then stood close, feeling the warmth and watching the smoke in the windless air sending out signals for spring to hurry. He was laughing that day when he came in, a sudden schoolboy, entranced by doing what he normally would not be allowed to do.

"Smashing!" he exulted boyishly, giving a rare chortle. "When I was young and had helped in the garden I was allowed to roast potatoes in the bonfire. They tasted smoky, but they were the loveliest potatoes I ever remember eating. It was autumn," he added. "Next to spring, I've always loved that time the best. And this year we are going to have a special spring."

That promise again.

The weather turned bitter shortly after that day.

(Continued on page 94)

Illustrated by Geri Greinke

MIRAGE ON THE AMAZON

Illustrated by Michael Nicastre

BY

MARY KISTLER

A
CAMEO
NOVEL

Once Laney and I had recovered from the shock of seeing the *Toucan*, we found our biggest problem was the humid, enervating climate of the Amazon Basin. Laney, my old nurse, was after all sixty and neither one of us was accustomed to such heat. We soon learned, however, that cooling winds blew across the ship and we had only to go on deck to find relief from our discomfort.

As to the *Toucan* itself, a more battered riverboat would be difficult to find. She was small, not more than 125 feet in length; her name was partially obscured by peeling paint. Airless-looking cabins occupied the center of the deck. Above the cabins rose a weathered bridge. Sun-bleached orange canvas, attached to the edges of the cabin roofs, stretched down to the deck railings. Much of it was torn and here and there strips flapped dismally in the hot wind.

On our fifth day aboard, the winds mysteriously ceased. I went to the bow, hoping to feel a stir of breeze. The air continued motionless. In the brief time I remained at the railing, my already damp body grew wet under my clothes and moisture stood at the edges of my hair. I turned away and recrossed to the shaded area of the deck. Settling into a chair, I looked at Laney. Her face was flaming like a poppy.

Mr. Merriweather, the first mate, had told me earlier in the morning that we were now a full 700 miles upriver. Hoping to cheer Laney up, I reminded her of this. She nodded glumly and merely said that we had 1800 miles to go before reaching our destination, Iquitos.

Hoping to distract her, I said, "And matters have not gone too badly up to now, do you think? Our quarters are adequate, the food has not yet done us in and," I finished drily, "Captain Sorenson's guardianship is above reproach."

Certainly, the captain offered no threat. In my case, not even friendly interest. He never came near me if he could avoid doing so, and in the time we had been aboard I had not seen him look in my direction more than once or twice. If we met on deck he sent his good morning or good afternoon to a spot somewhere beyond my left shoulder. When he came to pay his respects, as he did each morning, he nodded to me, turned away, then addressed himself to Laney.

I was well used to the fact that men were not attracted to me; Claire, not I, was the family beauty. I was plain, bookish and shy, but not so ugly that the icy, elegant captain of the *Toucan* could not look directly at me. Obviously he had an aversion to me, and my antipathy for him quite matched his own for me.

The curious, friendly crew, obviously under orders, gave us a wide berth. Except for Mr. Merriweather, Laney and I were left to our own company. We could not have had a safer passage, if we had been sent out under guard.

"Everything is just as you say," Laney replied, her interest reviving. "The *Toucan* has drawbacks, but we are making do. Mr. Merriweather is helpful and conducts himself with propriety. The captain, without question, commands his ship well. And he *seems* quite proper in his attitude . . ." Laney paused, frowning. "But I am convinced he is not what he seems. I wish to warn you against him."

I could scarcely believe what I heard.

"Warn me? Against a man who cannot bring himself to look in my direction?"

"I cannot explain my feelings in this matter, precisely. Although he does not seek you out—"

"Of course, he does not seek me out. He appears to find me offensive as well as plain."

Laney's fan stopped mid-swish, and she said severely, "I have told you before Julia, you make too much of your plainness. Your face is most comely. Most comely. And you have your mother's beautiful figure."

I did not argue. Captain Sorenson's glance of distaste, even distrust, when he first laid eyes on me had told me at our initial encounter all I needed to know about this man.

"I do not understand you, Laney. You know I dislike the commander heartily. To be perfectly honest, I cannot abide the man. And I thought the antagonism between him and me was apparent, not only to you, but to all on board."

"It is apparent. Nevertheless," Laney peristed stubbornly, "I trust my instincts regarding this captain, and where you are concerned, I shall keep my eye on him."

"Really, Laney, if you refuse to accept the fact that Captain Sorenson is avoiding me, then consider: this man appears to be over thirty years of age. Is it too strange to assume he is married, quite happily even? Why should he be making overtures to a total stranger?"

Particularly to a stranger like me, I added silently in a rare flash of bitterness.

"He is not married," Laney replied. "I asked Mr. Merriweather."

This was too much. I was so annoyed at Laney's presuming to make this embarrassing inquiry I did not trust myself to answer immediately. Then I was overcome by the absurdity of the situation. Here was Laney, keeping a conscientious watch to protect me from a man who was fleeing from me at every turn. I was forced to hide a smile and my good humor returned.

Laney said no more, and I, too, fell silent, preoccupied with a fresh trickle of perspiration running down the back of my neck under the high collar of my sprigged muslin dress. I unbuttoned the collar.

Laney immediately called me to task.

"Refasten your collar, if you please. The captain will soon be making his morning call. I do not wish him to see you in disarray."

"Disarray?" I asked, all of my annoyance returning. "An unbuttoned collar is disarray?"

"Kindly do as I say."

Annoyed or not, I knew I must oblige Laney in this request. I could have refused with a clear conscience, because as we both knew her authority was titular only. After all, I was twenty-three years old and had been in charge of my own affairs since the death of my father, two years before.

I tried, however, to accommodate Laney in such matters. I knew precisely what I owed my old nurse, my old friend.

She had been a surrogate mother to me since the death of my own mother when I was four years old; and it was typical of our friendship that when the terrifying letter from Claire arrived, she gave up everything familiar and dear to her to follow me halfway around the world.

I buttoned the offending collar, at the same time recalling that two out of the three petticoats I usually wore, were neatly folded under the mattress of my bunk. I had hidden them there when Laney's back was turned.

A short time later, when I saw Captain Sorenson approaching, I was struck by the irony of my buttoned collar when so many of my petticoats were missing. This hardly mattered, however, since the captain would not be looking at me.

En route, he paused to speak to a deckhand, and I saw Laney studying him critically, from under politely lowered lids.

"He's a Norwegian, you know," she said, much as one would say, "He's a headhunter, you know."

Trying to keep amusement from my voice, I answered, "Yes, so Mr. Merriweather told me. But it seems the captain grew up in England and was educated there."

"I do not care where he was educated. That man is no Englishman," Laney declared.

"But he never pretended to be," I said, laughing at last. I feel certain if you asked, you would discover that he has no desire to be an Englishman."

"Nonsense," Laney replied scornfully. "Everyone wants to be an Englishman."

And that closed the subject, which was just as well, as the captain started in our direction again. Once arrived at the shelter, he managed, as usual, to cut me deftly from his line of vision by staring vaguely all about me, saying, "Good morning, Miss Scott," as he turned toward Laney.

"And Miss Langford. Good morning. This heat is a dead bore, is it not?"

"As you say," Laney replied.

"I am glad to tell you that you shan't have to put up with it for long. The wind is moving in the same direction as the *Toucan*, and, unfortunately, is matching our cruising speed, so there is no movement of air. If the wind does not soon change direction, I shall alter the speed of the *Toucan* to break the stalemate."

"I am delighted to hear that this is so."

Laney made no further comment, and I was pleased to see even the captain look faintly daunted; but he pressed on.

"Otherwise you are getting on well, I trust? Your meals are being served promptly and are up to the mark? Your ceiling fan is in good order, no doubt?"

I stopped listening to this stultifying exchange. Instead, I studied Captain Sorenson. And, like Laney, not without prejudice.

He had removed his cap and tucked it under his arm as he greeted us, and his thick, dark hair shone in the hot light. His eyes were a cool blue-green. From where I sat I could not see a single bead of perspiration on his sun-darkened skin. He seemed impervious to the heat.

Such chill comes from within, I thought. A remote, self-contained and handsome man, accustomed to commanding others, a man who cast a cold shadow, even under the blaze of the equatorial sun.

Hard, unflawed, accepting strength and poise as his due, he would probably only be attracted to flamboyant and beautiful women.

As a child I had grown used to the fact that Claire was the one always complimented on her beauty and later sought after by young men. When she was around none of them would so much as cast a look in my direction and I grew up realizing that I could not entertain the usual expectations other girls could.

I took solace in study, following a natural bent. I was fortunate in my governesses and, later, was tutored by the rector of our village, a scholarly man who was delighted in teaching me. Had I been permitted to continue to higher studies, I should have considered myself a fulfilled person.

I had longed above all things to attend one of the four women's colleges established at Oxford University in the late 1800s, particularly Somerville, which was the first of these.

My difficult, autocratic father, shocked to the depths of his being by my request to go to Oxford, declared the scheme outrageous. Saying he wanted "no female with a headful of dangerous, bookish nonsense in his house," he turned a deaf ear to my entreaties.

I retaliated by retreating even deeper into my "bookish" ways, and with the guidance of my old teacher and the resources of my grandfather's fine library, I launched into a program of self-education that annoyed my father in the extreme.

This was something he could do nothing about, however. Even he dared not forbid me the library.

Still, he managed as always to have the final word. He died, leaving me a considerable fortune, with the stipulation that on no account was a farthing of this amount to be spent on my further education at a university.

I never forgave him for this. But in all fairness, I thought he could not have known what a cruel thing he had done.

As I was not of a brooding nature, I did not often reflect upon these past disappointments. Now I turned my thoughts back to Laney and Captain Sorenson, and found the captain speaking of a matter that riveted my attention.

"I thought perhaps you might like to know that by early morning we shall be anchoring off the town of Santarém. This is an old colonial village, established by the first Portuguese explorers. It is situated at the point where the Tapajos River enters the Amazon."

The captain paused, and then went on as though speaking to himself, "The Tapajos must be one of the most beautiful rivers in the world."

Something in Captain Sorenson's voice made me glance at him. I was astonished to see a faint flush rise in his cheeks as he talked.

Here is a man, I thought, who cares little for people, but loves this strange, heated land and its great rivers. I listened, watching him closely as he continued.

"The Tapajos is diamond-clear and a full fourteen kilometers at its mouth. It comes into the muddy flow of the Amazon like a streak of light—"

He broke off, embarrassed.

Outside of my cool morning to Captain Sorenson, I had been silent until now. But, set dreaming by what I heard, I spoke excitedly, perhaps a little loudly, "Oh, I do want to see that place!"

If a prehistoric river creature had craned his neck over the side of the boat and stated enthusiastically that he longed to visit a Brazilian village, Laney and Captain Sorenson could not have been more startled.

They both turned and stared at me and Laney said peevishly, "Good heavens, Julia, you positively made me jump."

The captain continued to look at me a moment longer. For an instant, I thought I saw laughter in those strange, jeweled eyes.

Then, glancing away, he said, "Do I understand that you wish to be called when we reach Santarém, Miss Scott?"

"Yes. I shouldn't miss it for anything—"

Laney interrupted. "At what hour would this be, Captain Sorenson?"

"Daybreak."

"Uncommonly early. In that case, I think perhaps we must decline. We shall be seeing many Brazilian rivers and villages, no doubt."

Not to be so easily cheated of my view of Santarém, I said, "It's true, Laney dear, this is an unconscionable hour for you to be seeing villages. I suggest I slip off without disturbing you and look at Santarém alone."

"Kindly see that we are summoned at daybreak, Captain Sorenson," Laney said, making a swift recovery.

"My pleasure, Miss Laneford. I shall inform Mr. Merriweather. He will knock at your door at the proper hour."

Captain Sorenson turned away. As he did so, he swept me with a glittering, aquamarine glance. I was surprised, annoyed, and quite suddenly out of breath.

After the noonday meal in our quarters, Laney and I undressed, put on loose wrappers, and lay down in our bunks. Since our second day on the Amazon we had observed the Brazilian custom of the *sesta* (*siesta* in Spanish, Mr. Merriweather had explained conscientiously), learning early how important this habit was in combating the heat.

Laney fell asleep instantly, but I, propped against my pillows, was skimming a book about the Amazon Mr. Merriweather had lent me.

Suddenly I encountered a passage that made the page leap before my eyes:

> The deadly piranha fish of the Amazon is a small razor-toothed fish whose voracious appetite spells death to anything in its path. Piranhas travel in schools and can be encountered anywhere. Most often, however, they range in close to shore, concealing themselves beneath Salvinia ferns, lying in wait for their prey. A school of piranhas can eat away the flesh of a 100-pound creature in a minute, leaving a skeleton still warm with life.

Sickened, I dropped the book beside me and closed my eyes. When I slept, finally, I dreamed I was standing at the railing of the *Toucan*, looking out over the river. As I watched, the brown waters of the Amazon began to bubble violently, turning pink, then dark red with blood.

I awakened and wiped my perspiring face with a handkerchief. I slept again, only to find myself involved in another terrifying dream.

The shock of this dream was mitigated by familiarity; I knew every inch of its dark terrain, because it had been a recurring dream since childhood and was about my fall from the tree—a rowan tree where I often climbed on a summer day, there to hide away in a secret world of wind and sunlight.

No one knew what happened to me that golden afternoon, because, as was my custom, I had gone to the tree alone. Except for what was surmised and told to me (a sudden turn, perhaps? an overbalancing?), my dreams were all I knew of the accident. I had no memory of the fall itself.

This much I could remember. Opening my eyes to find myself lying beneath the tree, my right hand under my cheek, not feeling pain but knowing something final and terrible had happened. It was not until I saw blood running down my wrist that I turned on my back and looked up.

Above me was a broken branch, its point bright with blood, as though the branch itself was bleeding. Too shocked to move I had lain there until I was found.

I had not been badly hurt but when the doctors removed the bandages from my face ten days later, a startlingly ugly scar ran down the side of my face. It was grotesque and the doctor, upon seeing me wince when I saw it in a mirror, assured me that in time it would disappear. But years later, even today, I could see traces of it and for a while, I knew my friends at school shied away from me. Certainly it caused Claire and my father no end of anxiety, especially Claire, who seemed to feel that my face would be permanently marred.

A dreadful and lamentable thing to have happened to a child. But in my waking moments I refused house room to this memory.

But sometimes as I slept, all defenses down, the memory crept back in confusing, everchanging dreams; and I fell again, crashing against branches, clutching empty space.

Sometimes I did not fall. The rowan tree was gone.

Even dreaming, I argued that there was a tree. Certainly I had been there alone.

Yet once, falling in another dream, I turned in air and looked up to see the faceless, melting outline of another person, hidden high above me in the leaves. Watching as I fell.

The following morning, Laney and I came on deck just as the last of night was lifting from the river. The *Toucan* was already riding at anchor a short distance out from shore.

Mr. Merriweather and Captain Sorenson were on hand to greet us, the gold braid on their caps touched by the sun, their crisp uniforms ghost-white in the coming day. Mr. Merriweather looked pleased, Captain Sorenson remote.

"There is the jungle, Miss Scott," Mr. Merriweather said. "It is only low jungle here at the mouth of the Tapajos, but a pleasant backdrop for Santarém, is it not?"

I had never seen such a place as Santarém.

Strung out along pale sands at the confluence of the Amazon and the sparkling Tapajos, a pastel city lay outlined against the jungle, its tall, narrow houses—pink, saffron, blue—glowing in the early morning light. Bougainvillaea rioted along edges of the red-tiled roofs of these houses and fell in clouds of color down peeling walls. Great black birds, huddled in trees or on the rooftops, occasionally took flight, gliding down the wind to the rotting wharf that ran along the river.

"King vultures," Mr. Merriweather explained, pointing to the birds. "In

Portuguese, *urubús*. The scavengers of the Amazon."

The more I studied the jungle, the more disquieting I found it. It was not difficult to imagine the secret life that went on inside its green heart.

"And what do you think of the jungle, Miss Scott?" Mr. Merriweather asked.

"I find it somewhat oppressive, I'm afraid."

"A deadlier place is scarcely to be thought of." This was Captain Sorenson, speaking abruptly from where he stood leaning on the rail. "One can think only in optimum terms here," he continued. "Soldier ants in such numbers that they can be heard on the march; snakes forty feet long, beetles as big as a man's hand, birds of prey that are the largest and fiercest in the world."

An icy wind passed my face and I could feel a chill descend on my spirit. Unbidden, the last line of the postscript of Claire's letter came to mind: "I believe I am slowly being poisoned." Claire had dated her letter May 8, 1912, but I did not receive it until the last day of August. She had written that she had been plagued with fever ever since April. Patrick, her husband, had summoned a doctor from Manaus who was puzzled by her fever and could do nothing more than prescribe the simplest remedies, none of which had proved in the least efficacious. Then she had let the letter lapse until June 6th and added the first postscript:

> *Patrick has been away for two days. Someone has been stealing latex from the rubber trees at the farthest edge of our properties, so he has gone into the jungle to investigate.*
>
> *I hope to God this letter reaches you. It may not, because my post is being watched, and I must bribe a servant to get the letter into Iquitos. I, too, am being watched. I never go out of the house now. I am not allowed to do anything on my own, even when I am able.*

And finally the last one:

> *Julia, please come out to me. Do not fail me, as there is no one else, and I no longer think I am suffering from fever. I believe I am slowly being poisoned.*
>
> *Your devoted sister,*
> *Claire*

In the light of day my common sense told me that the melodramatic suspicions contained in those strange, heart-stopping paragraphs could only have been born out of the heated confusion of fever dreams. But this same common sense often deserted me in the haunted nights when I would awake and feel my mouth go dry.

What was the truth about my half sister? The only thing I was certain of (and had been since the arrival of her letter in England) was that I must reach her as quickly as I could.

Meanwhile, knowing how disturbed Laney would be by the two final paragraphs of the letter, I practiced a small deceit.

I took the last frightening page from the letter, destroyed it, and substituted one of my own devising, writing the following false conclusion to my sister's terrifying communication:

> *My fever has abated somewhat, but I am still not well enough to travel. And I do long to see you and Laney again, Julia. It seems impossible, does it not, that it has been seven years since the three of us were last together? Too long! Since I cannot come to England at present, perhaps you and Laney could come out to me? I assure you that the sight of you would be more beneficial than any medicine!*
>
> *Your loving sister,*
> *Claire*

These were the words I had read aloud to Laney in lieu of Claire's own.

When I had finished reading, I had said as casually as I could, "I think it would be a splendid thing to visit Claire, Laney. What do you think?"

Laney, who had never set foot out of Surrey in all of her sixty years, hesitated only an instant before answering me.

"No need to ask me what I think. I can see by the look of you that you have set your mind on this journey. I shall, of course, accompany you. How could I allow you to go traipsing all over the face of the globe alone? It simply would not do."

I knew, of course, that I was taking a chance exposing Laney at her age to such a long and arduous journey. But I could not contemplate leaving her. She had no one but me now that Claire had left and Claire had always been her favorite. The thought of the hurt she would suffer if I attempted to make the journey alone was too much to bear.

After breakfast the heat began, we returned to the deck.

The *Toucan* was again under way but moving slowly, running parallel to the shoreline, and only a short distance out. I went back to my preferred position at the railing; Laney retreated to her chair in them shade of the awning.

The morning was growing hotter, but determined to miss nothing, I remained at the railing. Even with my hat on, the perspiration now stood on my face like hot dew; but occasional puffs of cooling wind made my position bearable.

When Mr. Merriweather returned to the bridge, Captain Sorenson, to my surprise, rejoined me at the rail, standing a little apart. I was not pleased, but I soon forgot his presence, so transfixed was I by the sight of a flock of big-beaked scarlet birds, shooting through the trees like streaks of flame.

"Toucans," the captain said.

He had scarcely gotten the word out before Laney appeared magically at my other elbow. An awkward silence ensued and I wished again that the captain would go away. He gave no sign that he noticed the silence, but seemed preoccupied with watching the riverbank.

After a time he turned and called up to the bridge. "Start putting into shore, Mr. Merriweather."

The *Toucan* began threading its way in closer to land, avoiding coves and mudbanks and, at one point, nosing past a half-submerged sailing vessel, rotting in the water.

We dropped anchor near a floating dock. Beyond the dock was a clearing in the jungle.

A cart, piled high with wood, and drawn by a giant mule, moved into the clearing. The driver and a boy who was sitting atop the pile of wood jumped to the ground and began unloading their burden, transferring it later to the swaying dock. From there the deckhands of the *Toucans* carried the wood on board.

Another cart appeared; three in all came and went, delivering a staggering amount of wood. I could only think that the engines of the *Toucan* ate with gusto.

When the transaction was concluded, the drivers and their helpers gathered on the dock while the *Toucan*'s chief engineer paid them their earnings. This proceeding took some time, and I turned my attention to other things.

Some distance down the bank, one of the mules, left untethered, was making his way toward the river's edge, the empty cart bouncing along behind him. Doubting that he had been given water while pulling his heavy loads of wood, I watched with satisfaction as he reached the river and went in, ankle deep.

But he did not drink.

Instead, he started tossing his head wildly about, and a racking shudder rippled down his flanks. Puzzled I continued to watch the poor beast. He began to lift his feet in a grotesque, clownish dance. When I thought I heard a low moan on the wind, I shuddered, too.

"Captain Sorenson . . . that mule . . . just down the riverbank . . ."

The captain, who had been watching the activity on the dock, looked where I pointed, as did Laney. The captain did not look long, but issued an order in rapid Portuguese to the nearest deckhand. The deckhand departed, running. The captain leaned over the railing and shouted to the men on the dock. They swung around, talking excitedly, gesticulating toward the animal. Then they grew silent as they watched.

The mule, thrashing horribly now, plunged deeper into the river, retreated a few steps and crashed against the rickety shafts that held him, breaking them. With another frenzied swing of his head, he pulled his harness apart in a dozen places and turned back toward the shore. Floundering, falling and rising, he struggled onto the riverbank again and stood, his sides heaving, his head lowered.

The deckhand returned, still running, and came up behind us, holding a rifle. The captain, without looking back, reached for the gun and lifted it to his shoulder in a single motion. He shot twice. The mule's legs twitched, sank, grew still.

"Piranhas," he said tonelessly.

I ducked my head as though sustaining a blow. Where the mule had stood, the waters of the Amazon were just as I had dreamed them yesterday, pink-red with blood.

After the events of the morning, neither Laney nor I was able to eat our noonday meal. When lunch was carried away, we got into our wrappers and retreated with relief to our bunks. We lay for some time without speaking.

At last Laney said, "A fine place Claire has brought us to. It's a wild land, that's what it is."

Yes, a wild land, and one of bewildering contrasts. Above us, the glorious crimson flight of the toucan bird; below us, piranhas waiting, a vicious shadow under the surface of the river. A magnificent, terrifying place, the Amazon, vast and lonely.

How strange to think of Claire at home on its banks. Or had she ever really felt at home? She had written longingly of England on occasion. Never more than an occasional sentence, but enough to make me wonder if her exciting way of life and her "marvelously happy" marriage to Patrick Courtney had entirely compensated for her self-imposed exile.

Patrick Courtney.

Thinking of him, I felt a small shock as I remembered a phrase from Claire's letter that I had not examined separately until this moment.

"Do not fail me. I have no one else."

But, of course, Claire had someone else. Her "devoted" husband!

Yet, I realized now, there had been few references to Patrick in Claire's last letter. On June 6, when she had writen the postscript, he had been "two days" from home. Had he returned by now from the "edges of his properties?" Surely he would not have left her ill and alone, with only the servants to care for her?

And how to account for her failure to mention him more often? Especially as she had always been prone to say rather too much of him in her correspondence. Why that disturbing sentence: *"I have no one else?"*

Laney was speaking again, but my distraction was such that I could scarcely concentrate on what she was saying. It was with the greatest effort that I managed to do so.

"Just think of Claire, established for life in this outlandish place," Laney was saying bitterly. "And all because she was determined and willful, going against everyone's advice. She could have made a brilliant marriage in England, and lived in England always, secure, peaceful."

Certainly, Claire could have made the sort of marriage Laney wished for her.

Since childhood she had had a kind of glowing loveliness about her. Her dazzling red hair and up-tilted amber eyes were part of this, but it was her will-o'-the-wisp ways, her tinkling laughter that beckoned and beguiled. She was like a flame in the wind, always out of reach. Men flocked to her beauty and, more often than not, were singed for their trouble.

"Claire did not think in terms of security and peace," I said. "She wanted to be an actress, and the life of an actress is uncertain by definition. She could not help what she wanted."

"Well, we cannot deny that she became an actress—of sorts. And look where it landed her. In an outpost of civilization, on the edge of a jungle. And she is managing to land us there, as well, mind you."

"We came of our own free wills."

Laney, unable to deny this, fell silent. Then she spoke again. "Claire could have had anything—everything. But she threw it all away. Worst of all, she defied her own father, and broke his heart."

"No," I replied coldly. "She did not break Father's heart. He had no heart to break."

Laney closed her eyes and said no more. After a time she slept.

I turned over in my bunk again and, to distract myself from disturbing thoughts, forced my attention on the changing sky outside the open porthole.

For a time I watched listlessly, but when the sky darkened without warning, I raised myself on one elbow.

In the space of a breath, the sun had gone. Purple clouds, swollen with rain, boiled past. A flash of lightning blotted out the porthole, and a great crack of thunder rolled down the river. A storm of consequence was in the making.

I looked across at Laney. Incredibly, she slept on. Seeing her so, precipitated a plan. I was a lover of storms and I was consumed with restlessness. I would go on deck and watch the Amazon in its fit of temper.

When I reached the deck, I started toward the bow, but I had gone only a few feet when the storm broke with such force and violence that I was halted. The clouds simply opened. The rain poured, beating across the *Toucan* in huge, metallic drops that hit and bounced.

Fearful of losing my balance and being swept overboard, I made my way back toward the canopied area, clinging to whatever came to hand. On my way, I looked up at the bridge and saw a blurred figure moving about behind the steaming windows of the wheelhouse. It was the barest glimpse because the wind drove water into my eyes and forcd me to lower my head.

I reached the awning and moved in under the edge of it; but even here I had to anchor myself. I caught hold of the side of an open porthole in one of the cabins and steadied myself. Then I turned back and looked at the river.

The storm was a magnificent one, of Judgment Day proportions, filled with all the sound and fury one could wish for. And the Amazon, before my startled gaze, became a sea.

I was cold to the bone, but I counted this as nothing. My excitement at the awesome sight before me left no room for such small considerations.

At last, with a final boom of thunder, the storm ceased as abruptly as it had begun, leaving me blinking with surprise. The *Toucan* steadied myself, the sun came out, and in minutes steam was rising from the deck. I came out from under the canopy rather cautiously; a hot fresh wind sent my skirts whipping. I shook out my hair and resumed my walk to the bow.

I arrived there just as a great drift of orange butterflies flew in across the *Toucan* and landed everywhere. On me. On the deck. On the railing. I stood motionless, lost in wonder, feeling their whispery footsteps crossing and recrossing me. One butterfly lit on my wrist and I held it out before me, marveling.

Too soon, the butterflies took their leave, floating away in an apricot cloud. I stood on at the railing, bemused. Then I shook out my hair again and tried to pull my clothes into some semblance of order.

As I turned and started back toward the cabins, I glanced up at the wheelhouse once more. What I saw stopped me dead in the tracks.

Captain Sorenson was on the bridge. He must have come out of the wheelhouse immediately after the storm, because he looked well-established in his deck chair and much at his ease.

I had never seen him like this. His cap was rakishly aslant, his collar unfastened, and he was lounging in his chair, his long legs thrust out in front of him.

Captain Sorenson *lounging*? I was astounded. Surely this could not be our rigid, tediously correct commander. Captain Sorenson with his collar *open*?

I could only think that he had fallen asleep. There was no other way to account for the abandoned look of him. I could not be certain, however, because his eyes were hidden by the shadow of his cap. And if he were not asleep, I did not relish crossing the deck with him looking down from the bridge at me; but there was no other way to reach the cabins.

Uncomfortably aware of my clinging, half-dried clothes and my loose hair lifting on every breeze, I started out again.

I had almost reached the cabins when I heard a voice ask quietly "Did you enjoy your storm, Miss Scott?"

Appalled, I looked up. The captain had not moved an inch. His eyes, more blue than green now, were wide open, and full upon me.

I could think of nothing but my disarray, and this was disarray with a vengeance. My cheeks flamed, but I rallied as best I could, saying crisply, "It was not *my* storm Captain Sorenson."

"Was it not? I remarked upon the suddenness of it, until I saw you on deck and realized you had magicked it up for your own enjoyment."

What kind of nonsense was this? I was unaccustomed to such banter, and I could think of no answer. Still, I stayed.

"Do you deny it, then?" he went on, smiling directly at me.

It was a smile of dangerous charm, and, annoyed that it had thoroughly unsettled me, I said too brusquely, "Naturally I enjoyed the storm."

"Because you are a sea witch, Miss Scott. Do no pretend otherwise. At least not to me."

"Good day, Captain Sorenson," I said suddenly, fleeing at last.

As I went I was followed by laughter, and the sound of it made me feel quite light-headed. What had happened to this man? It was as though another captain altogether had come aboard in the storm.

It seemed to me that from that day forward a subtle change came over those aboard the *Toucan*.

The *Toucan* herself underwent change. From Belém to Santarém she had been plagued by capricious currents, which made for fits and starts of speed. The morning after the storm, however, I awakened to the sound of accelerated engines; and for the rest of the voyage these engines never faltered. They ceased only when we put into port or when the dense tropical night closed over the Amazon, forcing Captain Sorenson to anchor.

The heat grew more intense as we progressed upriver. Laney sagged under the weight of it. Her tongue sharpened, and I struggled to maintain some balance of good humor between us.

At this same time the *Toucan*'s chief engineer became ill. His duties were inherited by Mr. Merriweather, who was now often absent below deck. When he was topside he had little time to seek Laney and me out.

Even the sleepy-eyed crew turned alert and busy. Fewer shouted Portuguese conversations, less easy laughter rang out.

Of the strange captain from the storm, I saw nothing more. It was as though he had walked away on the wind. I wondered if I had imagined him and the orange butterflies. No matter. I could only feel relief that this disquieting captain was gone. I had been out of my depth with him.

Captain Sorenson was quite his old self, preoccupied, cooly competent. Yet even he appeared to have undergone one slight sea change. He seemed, at last, to have come to terms with himself regarding my looks; from the day of the storm he had no difficulty looking directly at me.

This made me feel more amiable toward him. But I could not forget what an unconscionable time it had taken him to arrive at this point, so while the awkward situation between us was improved, it could not be said that we were friends.

On the morning of the day out from Santarém, Mr. Merriweather appeared on deck and hailed me as I stood at the rail, holding my open parasol with one hand, mopping my face between breezes, with the other. I turned toward him, hoping he would join me. His visits were all too rare now and I missed them. He was a pleasant companion, and when I was with him I was distracted from my private ghosts.

"Do spare me a moment, Mr. Merriweather," I called back. "I need to ask you something."

He crossed over to me and leaned on the rail. "And now what is it that has you all agog, Miss Scott?" he inquired, smiling.

His narrow face had a honed-down look. Heat and overwork, I thought.

"I understand from a conversation between the captain and Miss Laneford that we are approaching the city of Manaus. Are we near?"

"Two days out only. But we shall be bypassing Manaus, which is a bit out of the way, eleven miles up the Rio Negro River from the confluence of the Rio Negro and the Amazon. We only put into Manaus every third run. On other runs, such as this one, we resupply at a floating village called Ilha do Careiro, on the Amazon. We shall be making our market stop tomorrow morning and then be on our way again."

I was deeply disappointed. I had hoped to see Manaus for many reasons but especially because Claire, upon her arrival in Brazil seven years ago, had come first to this place. Her early letters were filled with the marvels of this fairy-tale city.

The wealth of the rubber barons on the Amazon, she had written, staggered the imagination. Not since the time of the ancient Incas had such riches been found in South America. Manaus was the center of the rubber activity. Its inhabitants accepted electric streetcars and automobiles as part of daily life, while most cities of the world had not progressed beyond horse-drawn carriages. The rubber barons sent their children to the finest schools in Europe and dressed their wives in Paris gowns.

But all this had occurred at the peak of the rubber boom and, according to Mr. Lynn of the *Star of Brazil*, the boom was declining. I was curious to see if Mr. Merriweather agreed on this point.

"Is Manaus not now the same as formerly, Mr. Merriweather? I was told that the rubber ports are changing."

"Changing rapidly. Since the startling decline of rubber production in 1910, a feeling of unease, even of panic, pervades the Amazon and its cities.

"Nevertheless," I said regretfully, "I should have liked to visit this city. My sister, Claire Courtney, who was an actress, once performed in the Teatro Amazonas there." Then honesty compelled me to add, "Briefly."

I did not say how briefly. By the time Claire had reached Manaus, less distinguished artists were being billed at the opera house; her troupe might well have been the least distinguished of them all, because the play closed after one week. She and the other actors were stranded in this steaming, jungle city.

Claire appealed to our father for passage money back to England. He refused her, adding the disagreeable rejoinder that since she had made her bed she could now lie on it.

Scarcely a month later, Laney and I received a letter from Claire saying she had married an Englishman "of consequence," had gone to Peru to live and was making her home at a place called *Casa de los Vientos*. It was a great rubber plantation just outside of Iquitos.

I realized Mr. Merriweather was addressing me. I turned back to him, glad to stop thinking about Claire.

"I can see you are disappointed in this matter of Manaus, Miss Scott. But I offer you consolation of a different kind. When we anchor tomorrow evening we shall be anchoring on the waters of the Rio Negro. This is the Amazon's mightiest tributary, a river of stunning proportions and great strangeness."

"Tell me about it, please."

"Clear and black, it enters the Amazon below Manaus, and the coming together of the rivers is called 'the meeting of the waters.' An apt description, because though the rivers meet, they do not mingle. No one knows how, but the Rio Negro is able to maintain its own identity for fifty miles, flowing serenely and separately beside the Amazon. It never at any time merges with the Amazon. It simply sinks beneath it."

We fell silent, both of us, I was certain, dreaming of this wonderful river and its inexplicable alien passage.

When Mr. Merriweather spoke again, he asked, "Would you like to go ashore with me tomorrow to make purchases? The floating market is an interesting place. Most colorful."

I said enthusiastically, "Oh, may I? I should like that extremely."

"I thought you might," he replied, smiling at me again.

"Tell me, Mr. Merriweather, do you make this run to Iquitos only to return immediately to Belém?"

"On this voyage, yes. After unloading our cargo and seeing you and Miss Laneford safely ashore, we shall be on our way again. Our schedule is not always so. When it can be managed, Captain Sorenson likes as long a layover in Iquitos as possible. You see, he has . . . has a . . . a friend there . . ."

My companion floundered to an embarrassed halt.

Oh, that kind of friend, I thought. I was much diverted by this piece of information, but if Mr. Merriweather considered that he had surprised me with his inept revelation, he had not; the only surprise I felt was that the captain had only *one* such friend in Iquitos. I should have thought more.

With an effort I brought my mind into focus and decided to ask Mr. Merriweather something I had planned to ask for some time.

"Are you acquainted with my half sister, Claire Courtney, and her husband Patrick Courtney?"

"Yes," Mr. Merriweather answered. "Mind you, most Europeans in Iquitos know each other at least slightly, as this is not a large place. Fifteen thousand souls at the high point of the rubber boom, somewhat less now."

"I have not yet met my brother-in-law, as he has never visited England. Could you tell me something of him? Do you know him well?"

I thought Mr. Merriweather hesitated. "Not well, although our paths have crossed for many years. As I say, even when is not particularly acquainted with another Englishman in Iquitos, one knows *about* him. The servants in the European households are all connected and they gossip endlessly. The Courtney servants are unique in that they are Brazilian instead of Spanish, brought from Manaus when the Courtneys moved to Iquitos. You will want to speak Portuguese at *Los Vientos* whenever possible."

This was most informative. But how neatly Mr. Merriweather had sidestepped my question about Patrick.

"Perhaps you know my sister rather well?" I persisted.

"I know her. Again, not well, I'm afraid. Will both of the Courtneys be meeting you when we dock?"

It was my turn to dissemble.

"Not Claire, I think. She has had a touch of fever lately. But I expect my brother-in-law to be on hand when we disembark. Mr. Lynn telegraphed him of our taking passage on the *Toucan* and advised him of our date of arrival."

"Splendid. We shall deliver you directly to him."

I could see that Mr. Merriweather either had nothing further to say about my family or, if he did, for some reason had no wish to say it. I gave up and inquired instead about the *Casa de los Vientos*.

"Very beautiful. It is situated high on the bluff above Iquitos, at the edge of the jungle, and is built in the colonial

Portuguese style. And now, Miss Scott," he continued, turning to me and assuming an air of mock severity, "you have not had your language lesson in some time. Kindly translate *Casa de los Vientos*, to begin."

"House of the Winds."

"Just so. But try this."

I plunged into my lesson enthusiastically, only to be told that my accent was frightful, that I had regressed lamentably, and that he, Mr. Merriwether, quite despaired of me. Our interview ended in laughter.

This laughter was interrupted by a crisp command from the bridge. "May I speak with you, Mr. Merriweather?" Captain Sorenson asked, from where he stood looking down at us. And then he added drily, "At your convenience, of course."

"Certainly, Captain," Mr. Merriweather answered, unperturbed, and bidding me an easy good morning he turned away and started toward the ladder to the bridge.

I was not so amiable. "At your convenience," indeed! Much incensed in Mr. Merriweather's behalf (what right had the captain to add this sarcastic addendum to his command?), I closed my sunshade with an angry snap. Then I, too, left the railing.

I headed toward the deck awning and passing the bridge saw Mr. Merriweather already halfway up the ladder. Captain Sorenson was still on the bridge in the same position, still looking down.

In the days before the storm I should have been compelled, in spite of my resentment, to pretend I had not seen him. Now I did not hesitate to send him a smouldering glance as I went by, only to be further annoyed by seeing the shadow of a smile touch his rigid mouth.

The next morning, determined to be in good time to go ashore with Mr. Merriwether, I hurried through breakfast and was on deck at an early hour. The *Toucan* was just anchoring at the floating market where we were to resupply.

This market was a curious place. On the bank of the river was a small settlement of reed huts mounted on stilts, and extending out from the bank at right angles was a dock. In the lee of this floating dock, a large fleet of open boats carrying merchandise of every kind bobbed up and down. The owners of the boats stood in their rocking crafts hawking their wares.

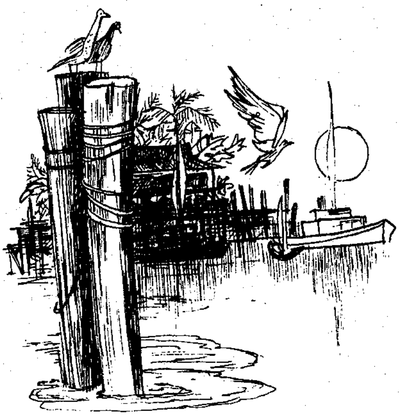
The air was snapping with excitement, and I looked anxiously about for Mr. Merriweather.

To my astonishment, Captain Sorenson approached me and bowed. "Mr. Merriweather has told me of your wish to see the floating market, Miss Scott, and since he has some business to do aboard I have taken the liberty of offering to escort you in his stead."

I was so taken aback that I'm quite sure I gave an involuntary gasp and equally sure that Captain Sorenson noticed. For suddenly, in an instant transformation that other Captain was there. His eyes gleamed wickedly as he said, "I see you are quite ready, Miss Scott. Let us be off."

With that he took my arm and before I could protest we started down the gangplank. We hadn't gone far when we were forced to stand a little aside to allow a man coming aboard to pass us. He was short and fat and with dark hair and protruberant dark eyes. He was dressed in a soiled linen suit and seemed to ooze perspiration at every pore.

Taking an instant dislike to him because of the bold way he had studied me in passing, I waited until he was beyond us and inquired who he was.



"I've never seen him before," the Captain replied. "He may have some business with Mr. Merriweather."

"I sincerely hope he has not come aboard to book passage on to Iquitos."

"I assure you there is no way he could do so. Have you forgotten that the *Toucan's* . . . er . . . accommodations are somewhat limited?"

"No, I am reminded almost daily," I replied, laughing. I chanced a glance at my companion. He was relaxed and smiling down at me. Involuntarily, I began to relax, too, and then was astonished to realize that I felt happier than I had in days.

We stepped down onto the wharf and the Captain warned me to walk carefully. This wharf, like the one at Belém, was uneven with age and slippery with discarded fruit skins and debris. It was necessary for me to lift my skirts and walk with care, but I did this automatically, keeping pace with Captain Sorenson as he progressed down the pier, selecting and bargaining in his excellent Portuguese. Entranced, I took in the bizarre, noisy scene before me.

The first amazing sight was a boat with a cargo of bread, crusty brown loaves upended, uncovered, and lined up neatly. I had never seen a boatload of bread before.

Other boats rocked with loads of fruit, vegetables, flapping ducks and chickens. There were stacks of wooden sandals, bright strings of glass beads, birds in cages and monkeys on chains.

The bewildering array went on and the buying and selling was heavy and quarrelsome. Captain Sorenson seemed much at home in this abrasive atmosphere and appeared more than a match for the most aggressive bargainers.

Halfway down the pier he paused to buy me a cooling drink in a rough clay cup.

"A native drink made from berries of a creeping vine that grows only in Amazonas.

"Delicious," I said, and it was.

I started on a couple of feet ahead of the Captain when he grabbed my arm and, fixing me with a piercing gaze, said, "Miss Scott, do not go so far ahead of me. It's not safe. You must stay close."

I felt the blood come up into my face and unaccountably my heart started pounding. "Oh," I had to swallow hard. "I'm sorry. I shall stay close by."

But two minutes later I found myself separated from him. I was in the act of turning back, when someone fell against me giving me a sickening blow between the shoulder blades.

Caught unaware, unable to maintain my footing on the dock, I careened wildly across the warf. I reached out desperately for the only object in my path, a free-standing birdcage. I succeeded in toppling the cage, but not in halting my terrifying progress. Amid flying feathers and raucous cries I spun on toward the edge of the dock, where, with eyes now grown wide with horror, I saw there was no railing.

And just beyond the pier lay the Amazon, thick with Salvinia ferns.

Gasping, incandescent with fear, I reached out, only to clutch empty air. I felt a scream rising in me, but the scream died when I struck the brink of the mouldering wharf and fell against a row of balls of raw rubber that checked my headlong plunge into the river. But the row came only to my knees, and I was already toppling toward the gently-lapping waters when a strong arm encircled my waist and swung me fiercely around.

It was Captain Sorenson. We stared into each other's eyes. His face was dead white and his eyes, filled with sunlight, looked overbright, as though he suffered from a fever.

Supporting me with a strong arm around my waist, he led me over to a bale of cotton, where I sat down. A wave of nausea swept me. I pressed a handkerchief to my mouth, and sent a hot, slanting look toward the river.

Taking the handkerchief away, I spoke in a stifled whisper, asking a question that had to be asked. "Piranhas? Here?"

The Captain, his lips pressed into a straight line, nodded grimly. Then, a wave of compassion and something else—tenderness—swept over his face. He reached into his back pocket, took out a handkerchief and, tilting my head up with his other hand, he wiped the burning sweat from my face.

Captain Sorenson finished his task quietly, then put his handkerchief away. I had had a terrible experience but somehow sitting there with the captain beside me I did not feel frightened. We sat in silence until finally my companion spoke.

"My fault," he said. "I should have kept you under much closer watch." He looked at me intently and shook his head.

"Oh, no," I said. "You must not say that. You warned me and I wandered away anyhow." I could not bear the thought of his blaming himself.

"Not so, I'm afraid," he said shortly. "I just thank God you are—are you all right, now?"

"Yes. Quite." I got to my feet. "Please think no more about it. I shall simply tell Laney that I slipped when someone lurched against me on the pier and had a knock as I fell and that miraculously you rescued me."

He smiled briefly. "It was far too near a thing for comfort." He picked up his hat which had flown off when he swung me wildly about. "Now," he continued, "I shall take you back on board."

Laney was startled to hear about the accident but much more indignant at the fact that Captain Sorenson, not Mr. Merriweather, had taken me ashore. She had not found out much before the time we returned to the ship. She started blaming herself at first for not having accompanied me but then seemed to decide she was probably better off for not having had any part of the experience.

That evening, to my surprise, Captain Sorenson called on us in our stateroom. He did not stay long and did not take a chair, but stood talking easily on a number of subjects. He mentioned the accident once, saying that he regretted its occurrence. He then asked if I had quite recovered from my unpleasant fall.

By this time I was suffering from hidden bruises and a bone-deep weariness, but I thought I detected anxiety in the Captain's face and, wanting to spare both him and Laney, I stated I had experienced no ill effects. I could feel my breath shorten as I saw the commander study me closely, his blue eyes glinting, but he made no further comment and soon after took his leave.

That night I slept fitfully, awakening time after time to find myself raised on one elbow or sitting up in my bunk before I was fully awake. So the night went, broken by wakefulness interspersed with disagreeable little naps; and through it all some illusive memory kept skirting the periphery of my mind.

At last I waked on a sudden loss of breath and lay motionless. During my last nap I had caught the memory finally; and what I remembered was the *precision* of the blow that had sent me reeling across the pier.

Breathing shallowly and quickly, I asked myself: Is it possible I was pushed this morning? Deliberately?

My rational self denied this: No, not possible! You are a stranger in this place. You have no enemies. Who would want you dead?

I answered back from some deep, cold place inside me: *Someone determined that I not reach Claire.*

I rose at first light the next morning and was at the washstand splashing cool water into my face, when Laney awakened too, complaining of one of the headaches that sometimes afflicted her. I urged her to stay in bed; and I remained in the cabin for the rest of the day, attending her.

After dinner Laney slept again, and I settled myself in a chair by the door leading onto the deck. As long as Laney was awake, I had managed to hold my thoughts at bay. Now it was time to face and weigh the frightening question which had circled the edges of my mind since morning . . . that unnerving, half-dreamed suspicion that I had been pushed on the wharf yesterday.

Was it true? Certainly, in the dark, heated night I had thought so.

Now, sitting in a wash of pale gold light, listening to the reassuring throb of the *Toucan*'s engines, I was glad to feel an emerging doubt.

There was, to begin, the question of how sound my judgment could be in the aftermath of such an experience; but I refused to deal in emotions and imponderables. I would deal only in facts.

Mr. Merriweather had told me Ilha do Careiro was a scheduled stop for the *Toucon* on this voyage. Since Mr. Lynn had telegraphed ahead, it was known in Iquitos that I, Claire Courtney's sister, was arriving there twenty days after my departure from Belém. Ilha do Careiro was midway between Belém and my destination. That left a full ten days for someone to depart Iquitos on a fast vessel, reach this village, and meet the *Toucan*.

No question that my assailant could have been waiting for me on the pier at Ilha do Careiro.

The plan seemed well-conceived up to this point. But what of the attempt on my life? This part of the scheme, in retrospect, appeared to have no plan at all, to depend entirely upon chance.

How could it have been known, for instance, that I would come ashore? I had not known this myself until the previous afternoon.

My attacker must have recognized that I would not be allowed on the wharf without an escort. What sure plan could he have of luring me from my escort long enough to strike? My wandering away had been accidental, all on my own.

And there was no certainly his attempt to push me into the piranha-infested waters of the Amazon would succeed. The wharf must always be crowded when a ship docked; the fact that there was a relatively open path across the pier at the time I was hit, was, once again, chance.

But most important of all: Why should someone come all the way to this outpost of the Amazon to hunt me down? How many surer methods of doing away with me once I reached Iquitos.

This brought me full circle to that old question, the validity of Claire's cry for help, a question as yet unresolved. I still did not know whether this outcry was based on solid evidence, or whether Claire, discouraged by the tenacity of her illness, had imagined a threat that was not there.

If the latter were true, the motive for the attempt on my life was automatically removed. My unfortunate experience yesterday could then only be an accident.

This line of thought cheered me. I should not forget what had happened to me on the wharf; but neither would I dwell on an upsetting, unproven suspicion.

Feeling more myself again, I got to my feet just as the engines of the *Toucan* shuddered to a stop, and I heard the captain shout, "Drop anchor!" I paused, puzzled. As it was not yet dark, I had not expected this command at this time.

Then I remembered what Mr. Merriweather had told me the day before. We must be anchoring early because we had reached the waters of that mysterious and glorious river, the Rio Negro.

Here was the distraction I needed, and I crossed the room in rising excitement and stepped onto the deck.

We were indeed anchored in the dark waters of the Rio Negro, close into shore. This river was vast, clear and inky, flowing side by side with the silty Amazon. Yet not a drop of water appeared to cross over, one to the other. It was as though these two great rivers, although they were now one, were separated by an invisible skin.

With a sigh of pleasure I turned back to study the nearby shoreline. We were anchored in so close I felt I could almost touch the scores of waterbirds—egrets, kingfishers, cranes—that stalked the banks,

The jungle came down to these banks, and inside the jungle I saw other birds; doves and tanagers joined the brilliant company of the macaws. Together they whistled, sang and chattered, sitting in rose trees whose trunks were as tall as the mast of a ship. There were wild fig, myrtle and banana trees, all dripping with necklaces of waxy pink orchids.

I stood until dark, held in thrall; and in the instant before the light left the river, the butterflies came again. This time they were all sizes and colors, and they dropped down across the jungle like a veil of flowers.

Although Laney was not entirely recovered from her indisposition the next day, she was never one to cosset herself, and she insisted that we be on deck at the usual time, to remain there through the morning.

When, near lunch time, I saw Captain Sorenson approaching the awning for his deck call, I looked over at Laney and discovered her dozing in her chair, a copy of *Blackwoods Magazine* open on her lap. Pleased to see her resting, I made no further sound; and when Captain Sorenson reached us, I put a warning finger to my lips. He paused at the edge of the awning and stood without speaking, taking us in with that lighted glance of his.

Then he moved close to my chair, leaned down and retied an already neatly tied shoelace.

"I understand, Miss Scott," he said softly, "that you regretted not seeing Manaus. I regret, too, that our schedule did not allow for this. But the Amazon is never short of wonders and I commend its mirages to you. They are quite marvelous and are most prevalent in the area we are approaching.

"Mirages?" I whispered back. "Are they different on the Amazon?"

"You should see for yourself, I think," he replied, straightening up, but still speaking in a low voice. "At the *sesta*, when the heat is heaviest on the river, that is when the mirages most often appear."

My imagination was set afire by the notion of the mirages, and I wished to see them, but the *sesta* was an awkward time. Laney would object violently to my coming on deck alone now that Mr. Merriweather was apt to be busy below and the captain more in evidence than formerly.

"At *sesta* time I shall be resting, I expect," I said.

"Quite so," Captain Sorenson murmured, turning back. "Most unwise, foregoing one's rest."

He was laughing at me. I threw him a resentful look, only to find this look countered by a shining gaze that quite undid me. To my annoyance, I felt my heart begin to pound heavily.

I knew then that I had been tricked.

This was not Captain Sorenson, but the captain from the storm, that dangerously attractive man who lived inside the chilly commander of the *Toucan*. What had called this captain back? Had he grown restless in his hiding place and come seeking diversion, diversion out of the question before, now made possible because he had rescued me from a terrible accident?

Or perhaps Laney's ever-deepening distrust of him had not gone unnoticed, and it amused him to see if he could lure me past her dragon-like defenses and into a light shipboard flirtation. He could not possibly have anything more permanent in mind.

Indeed, why should he?

If such diversion was what he sought, he was doomed to disappointment on this voyage. I knew nothing of sophisticated dalliance; and I had not wish to learn, particularly from this storm-captain who laughed so easily and said such outrageous things.

I was ill-equipped to understand such a man, and I knew that what could be no more than a quickly forgotten flirtation to the captain might to me be an episode too well remembered.

The captain was still standing nearby, speaking once more. "Should you change your mind, Miss Scott . . ."

"I shan't do that," I answered, tilting my chin proudly. "I thank you for telling me of the mirages, and perhaps I shall see them another time. When it is more convenient."

He inclined his head. "As you wish, of course. But I shouldn't wait too long. The mirages, naturally, are most elusive. You might miss them altogether."

With this Parthian shot, he turned away.

"Oh, dear," I whispered to myself, much agitated.

After luncheon I lay on my bunk, staring at the ceiling. I could think of only one thing: just outside my porthole, the glowing, unreal cities of the Amazon might this minute be appearing and disappearing, never to be seen in quite the same way again.

My situation was unthinkable, something nobody should put up with.

When I looked across at Laney, I was pleased to see that she slept deeply, as she had done since her bout with the headache. No doubt I should be back before she awakened, neither of us the worse for my deceit.

I crossed the cabin and began a hasty toilette. Although I chafed at the delay, I was compelled, because my head felt too warm, to let down my heavy hair and rebrush it. Afterward, glancing in the mirror as I pinned the knot at the nape of my neck into place again, I thought of my mother.

This often happened if I confronted my own image for longer than usual, as I had today. That, I think, was because I had my mother's coloring, and something of her aspect.

I did not delude myself for an instant that the resemblance went beyond that. I could never have been more than a pale replica of my lovely mother.

I remembered her only slightly, but I knew what she was like from the portrait that hung over the mantel in the drawing room at home. As a child I had stood before it by the hour, hungrily studying, as the less fortunate tend to do, consummate beauty. The long-lashed, indigo eyes, the fine bones, the implicit grace, the cloud of dark hair.

In those days, when Claire found me so, she tried to discredit the portrait. I paid little attention because I knew the reason and sympathized. Not anywhere in our house had our father hung a single likeness of his first wife, Claire's mother. There was not even a dim photograph in an old album, nor a faded daguerreotype overlooked in an unused

◆

If music be the food of love, play on.

William Shakespeare
Twelfth Night

room.

My hair done, I hurried across to the clothes press and took out the coolest of my frocks. It was of French voile, its color a pale tangerine, and it was simply made. It had no collar, only a narrow edging of lace at the throat. This lace was repeated in inserts down the bodice, and there was another narrow band at each wrist, gathering in the full, unlined sleeve. The skirt fell in folds, swirling as I walked. The frock had a matching parasol.

It was a pleasant ensemble and alarmingly expensive, as all of my clothes were. I bought such gowns, not out of vanity, but because I liked pretty things. Of course there was no reason why I should not do so. I could easily afford twice the number that I owned.

Picking up my parasol, I moved to the door that led onto the deck. There I paused, composing myself.

In spite of my resolution to disregard the captain, I felt timid about going on deck after so vehemently insisting I would be resting during the *sesta*. Even if the commander were in the wheelhouse, he could not fail to see me.

Still there was no help for it. Assuming a remote look, backed up by the knowledge that I was wearing a complement of petticoats, I emerged.

At first, dazzled by the sun, I could not see. Opening my parasol and retreating into its shade, I was startled to find Captain Sorenson not two yards away.

He wore a fresh uniform, and he greeted me with a blinding smile.

"Ah, there you are, Miss Scott. The mirages are just beginning and I have picked out the most advantageous spot for you. Just here, at the railing."

My face flamed. This wretched man had expected me all along.

I bid the captain a cool good afternoon, and walked to the rail. I took some trouble tiling my parasol into position, then fastened my gaze on the shoreline in what I hoped was a businesslike fashion.

"All established at your battle station, Miss Scott?" he asked pleasantly, making no attempt to hide his amusement.

I pretended not to hear.

"If so," he continued unabashed, "please look to your left and up the river, to the clearing on the bank just under that stand of casaba trees."

I looked, and in the next instant forgot everything but what I saw.

"A herd of giraffes!" I exclaimed. "Never had I thought to see such a thing!"

"Nor have you. That, my dear Miss Scott, is a flock of long-legged water-birds, walking at the water's edge."

"I stared the clearing dumbfounded. "Impossible."

"Watch, please."

As we drew nearer, the "giraffes" gradually diminished in size. By the time the *Toucan* was oposite the clearing, I saw that they were indeed nothing more than egrets and cranes, stalking dinner on their long legs.

Overcome by such a marvel, I forgot my earlier constraint and faced the captain eagerly, asking, "How can this be?"

"The combination of undulating water, and density of silt in the river is thought to be responsible for these curious vertical distortions."

I kept my eyes locked to the shoreline, and before long I saw a town not far away. Its thin houses were several stories high, mounted on stilts equally as high, so that the town, caught in levels of burnished air, was a golden city, reaching far above the tallest trees of the jungle. An enormous ship, wrapped in light, stood just offshore.

We approached the town and before my dazzled eyes it shrank to a huddle of thatched-roof huts, standing well above the water on posts. The ship became a small, battered sailing vessel, tied to a rotting deck.

"Oh," I breathed, and grew still again.

Captain Sorenson was silent, too, apparently as absorbed as I in watching the rise and fall of the secret cities of the Amazon. When he spoke a all it was to point out some strange sight in the jungle or to alert me to another quivering, heat-gilded mirage.

I forgot time, the hot embrace of sun and wind, and stood on at the railing of the *Toucan* spellbound, a lotus-eater lost in dreaming contentment. It seemed to me that I might have continued watching forever had not the helmsman called a question to Captain Sorenson. The commander turned and answered, delivering me from my spell.

I remembered Laney, and consulting the small gold watch pinned to my dress, I was startled to find well over an hour had passed. It was likely that Laney was still sleeping, however, and if I did not linger, I might avoid a *contretemps*.

I turned to Captain Sorenson, saying, "I think I must rejoin Miss Laneford now. But I wish to thank you for showing me the mirages. I agree that the wonders of the Amazon are without limit."

Sweeping me with that brilliant glance that always caught me unaware, he replied, "Since you enjoyed these wonders so extremely, mightn't you come tomorrow?" And then he added casually, "At the *sesta* time again, perhaps?"

I grew wary once more. It appeared that the commander was planning to invite me on deck often and always at *sesta* when Laney was absent, when he could be any captain he choose. At the moment he was all that was correct; but I knew his chameleon changes too well.

He looked at me expectantly, but I did not answer. When he spoke again, I realized that he had divined my thoughts.

"Miss Scott, I am inviting you at the *sesta* because during the hottest and quietest part of the day one sees sights that do not occur at other times. If the idea of being alone with me is troubling you, I must tell you that there is no such thing as being alone on the deck of the *Toucan*. The crew keeps both passengers and officers under the most interested surveillance at all times. Even I can rarely turn around without discovering at least two pairs of eyes glued to my person."

I laughed, diverted.

"They are as curious as children, are they not? And like children do not hesitate to stare one out of countenance. They have often done so with me."

"Do you mind?"

"Certainly not."

"Quite right. They mean no harm, and you must seem as wonderful to them as the Amazon does to you." He paused, then went on abruptly, "In point of fact, it is difficult for others of us not to stare, as well. You see, you are like some strange jungle flower blown aboard the *Toucan*. We do not know what to make of you."

No one had even spoken to me in such a way. For a foolish instant the compliment made me feel that I did possess some kind of beauty.

But not for long. I recognized the captain from the storm again and realized that this nerve-racking transformation had been managed even as I watched. How skillful this man was at catching me off guard.

But I was already calling myself to order, much struck by a glaring discrepancy the captain appeared not to notice. Until recently he had found it difficult to look at me at all; now he spoke of jungle flowers and said he felt compelled to stare at me.

All part of the new flirtatious fencing that seemed lately to amuse the commander, when he had nothing better to do. I was shocked at how close I had come to being taken in, forewarned as I was. I decided that this captain must be brought into line at once; and I could think of only one way to do this. I would meet sword thrust with blow of battle ax.

"Captain Sorenson," I said, "I would

like to come on deck whenever possible and hear all that you have to say about the river, because I enjoy this excessively. But I shan't do so if you continue to speak in this fashion."

The captain blinked. "I was not aware that I had spoken in any unusual fashion."

"Not unusual for you," I replied crisply. Then, coloring in spite of myself I plunged on. "I believe you are flirting with me, and I wish you would not. I am not accustomed to dealing in such coin."

"In what coin do you deal?"

"In friendships only."

"Very well. May I count myself your friend?"

"Of course," I replied.

And then I wondered uneasily if the captain's answer had not been too glib. I felt compelled to press my point.

"You do understand, do you not? I have made my attitude quite clear."

For a moment the captain did not speak. Then, "Miss Scott," he said drily, "you could not have made it clearer if you had addressed me through a hailing horn."

It was my turn to be amused.

Still uncommitted for the following day, and feeling much in control of the situation, I took leave of Captain Sorenson in high spirits.

These high spirits were reinforced by finding Laney still sleeping when I reached the cabin. I had come off scot-free, on all counts. Or so it seemed at the time.

The next afternoon Laney was slow to sleep when we lay down for the *sesta* and inclined to speak at length of Claire. I tried to divert her from this disturbing subject, but without success.

"Now when we reach Iquitos, Julia," Laney was saying from her bunk, "you are not to get into the fidgets over Claire. You must remember her splendid constitution. This is much in her favor, and I shouldn't wonder if her fever is not gone by the time we reach her. This tiresome voyage will then be all for nothing."

"Not for nothing, Laney," I said soothingly. "It will be lovely to see Claire again." And I forced myself to add, although with difficulty, "All recovered, as you say."

I realized that while Laney appeared to be comforting me, it was I who comforted her. Certainly, I was not deceived by Laney's astringent, half-critical manner of speaking of Claire; that was Laney's way. It had been clear since our childhood, that, of the two of us, she loved Claire the better. I felt no resentment over this.

I was four years younger than Claire, the child of our father's second marriage; and for three of those four years, my own mother had been alive. During that time Laney was my nanny, nothing more.

Claire, on the other hand, had been in Laney's special care from the moment she was born. Claire's mother, never robust, had not recovered from the ordeal of childbirth.

"Well, of course," Laney went on, elaborately casual, "we shall be pleased to see Claire again, naturally."

"Just so, Laney dear."

When Laney fell asleep at last, I got out of my bunk and redressed, putting on a cream frock of thin India silk. I picked up my tangerine parasol and went out the door of the cabin.

The captain was waiting on the deck, just where he had stood the day before.

"You are late, my friend," he said, welcoming me with that storm-captain smile that so distracted me.

En garde again, I asked cooly, "How can I be late when I did not say that I was coming?"

He laughed outright at that. "Your point is well taken, my dear" . . . the briefest of pauses before he added, "Miss Scott."

This man was incorrigible. Time to either retreat or bring out the heavy weapons. I decided in favor of the latter, since retreat was highly awkward.

"I am not your 'dear Miss Scott,' sir," I replied, coming down heavily on the "sir."

"Not yet," I thought I heard him murmur, as we took our places at the railing; but when I turned on him suspiciously, he sent me the blandest of looks and asked me if I did not think it somewhat cooler today than yesterday.

Surely I must have imagined the "Not yet," but I replied tartly, just in case. "I have not noticed any difference. And since I shall be on deck only a short time, I do hope the wonders you suggested as peculiar to *sesta* appear soon."

"Have you ever seen a pink dolphin?" he asked quietly.

"Never!" I answered, hopelessly ensnared by the prospect of such a sight.

"A school of them is approaching from uprvier. In this area they often play around the *Toucan* for hours at a time."

And so the dolphins came, and I forgot everything but these glorious creatures, leaping through the air in sparkling pink curves, falling, splashing, and even, in moments of what seemed uncontained exuberance, arcing across the bow of the *Toucan*.

It was an afternoon I never forgot; and the captain added to its perfection by turning pleasant and friendly, nothing more. The ultimate touch was finding Laney sleeping soundly when I returned to the cabin.

From that day forward, I met Captain Sorenson at *sesta*. Still easy to laugh, in all ways less formal at these meetings than at other times, he never again challenged me with his upsetting games. Together we watched the flamboyant theater of the Amazon and talked of many things. And in my naïveté, it did not occur to me that in assuming the role of "friend," he had not surrendered a fraction of his dangerous charm.

The halcyon afternoons came and went. The captain told me spellbinding stories and pointed out strange sights to me. He watched me out of eyes narrowed in slits of green light, but he never flirted with me again.

Our conversations could have been overheard by anyone, without the slightest embarrassment to either of us. I questioned everything I saw; and, although the captain was obviously amused by my thirst for information, he, like Mr. Merriweather, never seemed to tire of answering.

One day I inquired why the houses along the river were set high above the water on stilts.

"During the rainy season, the river often rises as much as thirty feet, sometimes more. In which case, one is likely to see the inhabitants of a hut perched on their rooftop, patiently waiting for the water to subside.

With each passing day I grew more at ease with the commander, and our conversations became less impersonal.

As we neared Iquitos, I began to wonder again about Patrick Courtney, and I resolved, since I had failed so dismally to learn anything about my brother-in-law from Mr. Merriweather, to make inquiries of Captain Sorenson. From what Mr. Merriweather had said, the commander and Patrick could scarcely fail to be acquainted.

I approached the matter more obliquely this time, saying in an easy way, "When Miss Laneford and I reach Iquitos, we shall be stopping at a place called *Los Vientos*—"

Captain Sorenson's reaction to this statement was totally unexpected.

"I know where you will be stopping," he interrupted almost violently. Then, as though recollecting himself, he went on in a quieter tone. "I had all the necessary information about your ultimate destination from Mr. Lynn of the *Star of Brazil*."

The captain's manner, like Mr. Merriweather's, did not invite further questioning, and for a time I relapsed into a troubled silence. Why this reluctance on the part of the *Toucan*'s officers to speak of *Los Vientos* and the Courtneys?

I had to know. "You are acquainted with Patrick Courtney and my sister Claire, I expect?"

Captain Sorenson stood quite still, his hands clutching the rail. Perhaps it was a trick of the relentless sunlight, but his fingers appeared to tighten on the railing.

He answered casually, however. "Oh, yes. In point of fact, I've known the Courtneys for years—in a way. A nodding acquaintance only."

Yet the commander was headquartered in Iquitos and Mr. Merriweather had said the European community was small there. A nodding acquaintance only?

Dissatisfied with the reply, I started to speak again. Before I could do so the captain turned and looked at me.

"You are your sister are most unalike," he said.

Was he trying to divert me? If so, he could not have chosen a better method. I hated comparisons between Claire and me. Of course, we were unalike. She was vivid and beautiful, while I . . .

"We are only half sisters, after all," I replied curtly.

"Yet I have the notion that you are more like true sisters, that you are very devoted?"

I felt that the captain was listening intently for my answer.

"We are extremely devoted. And now, if you will excuse me, Captain Sorenson, I think I must return to my cabin."

I departed abruptly, closing the cabin door before he could say another word. I was nettled by the captain's tactless comparison between Claire and me, and I decided that I should not join him the following day.

But the next afternoon at *sesta* I found myself prowling restlessly about while Laney slept; and I made up my mind that instead of skulking way in this silly fashion, I should go on deck and get a little of my own back. The captain was a reticent man, and I had always been curious about him. If he could put personal questions to me, I should put a few to him.

I opened the stateroom door and found him waiting at his usual post.

I greeted him, took my place at the railing, and said without preamble, "It occurred me after our conversation yesterday that you appear well-informed about me. Yet, although you and I are such 'friends,'" the emphasis was heavy here, "I know little of you. I feel myself at a disadvantage."

He smiled. "Tit for tat, is that it?"

He was so amiably aware of my revenge, that I had to laughed. "Yes," I said.

"Very well. What is it that you wish to know?"

We were back on our easy footing again, and I asked something that had interested me from the beginning. "What was your reason for coming to the Amazon?"

"I had been with the Booth Lines for a little above a year when my brother, Knute, came out to Manaus in 1902. I requested duty on vessels running between England the Brazilian rubber ports, so I could cross over with Knute whenver possible. He and I were great friends, close in age, and the only members of our family left."

"Did your brother come out because of the rubber boom opportunities?"

"No, he was looking for a fortune of another kind. Gold. He had some success, small strikes in areas around the Amazon, enough to keep him feverishly searching. One day he set out with an Indian guide and five Brazilian bearers on a routine prospecting venture. The party was last seen entering the high jungles above Manaus." The captain paused, went on. "Neither Knute nor any of his men was ever heard from again."

I stole a look at the commander's bronzed profile. It was as rigid as a profile on a coin, and I had the absurd impulse to comfort this suddenly bleak-faced man. I did not dare.

But the impulse was so strong that it must have reached him without words, because he swung around and stared at me. We were standing by the railing, quite close, and I saw myself reflected in his jeweled eyes.

For an instant neither of us seemed to breathe; the air between us leaped, making my head swim. Slowly, the captain reached out and traced my upper lip with his forefinger, wiping away a bead of perspiration.

His touch was as light as the passing of a butterfly across my lips, but I felt as though I had been passionately kissed. I could not move, but stood on, imprisoned in his blue-green gaze.

"Julia . . ." he began, his voice low and vibrant.

There was a click behind us; the captain dropped his hand to his side. The stateroom door opened. We turned together to find Laney.

"Good afternoon, Captain Sorenson," she said in a thin, icy voice. "May I speak with you for a moment, Julia?"

So strong is habit, it did not occur to be to refuse Laney's request. Without another word to the commander, I went blindly across the deck, followed her into the cabin and closed the door.

Moving like a sleepwalker, I crossed the stateroom and sat down in one of the wicker chairs. My mouth was still burning from the Commander's fiercy touch; nothing else seemed real to me.

"I have been meeting Captain Sorenson every afternoon since Manaus," I said.

"So I imagined when I awakened and found you gone," Laney answered quietly.

She also took a chair and sat for some time in silence.

"That, of course, was your choice," she went on finally, "but because I care a great deal about you, I feel compelled to restate my feelings on this matter, and this time I must say it all. I can only do this by being cruel . . ." To my astonishment, Laney's eyes filled with tears. "But it must be said."

I sat silent, waiting.

"I believe Captain Sorenson to be a wicked, self-seeking man bent on his own pleasures only. Unfortunately, he is a formidably attractive one, as well. These kinds rarely marry, I think, but if he should do so, he can pick and choose."

"He would not, of course, pick me." It was a statement, not a question.

"I do not think he would." A tear ran down Laney's cheek. She fished in her pocket for a handkerchief, and continued, "I am certain his intentions toward you are dishonorable . . . I cannot bear the thought of it . . ."

"What you are saying, I believe, is this. Plainness does not count in the dark."

"Oh, Julia . . ." Laney's tears were flowing freely.

If I were a sleepwalker before, I was awake now. For a single moment I hated Laney.

The moment passed. That was because I knew what these words had cost her. I also knew that they were true, echoes of my own warnings to myself.

I had forgotten these warnings at one pulsating (practiced?) touch from a man I hardly knew. What had happened to me?

I could only think that storms disappearing in the wink of an eye, references to sea witches with floating hair, clouds of orange butterflies, tended to bemuse the senses, to steal one's will away. I could not otherwise account for my brief, glowing fall.

I got to my feet and fetched Laney a fresh handkerchief.

"Give over crying, Laney, do," I said wearily. "I shall not see this man again. Your interruption has brought me to my senses."

Then, remembering how the commander's touch had, for an instant, made me feel beautiful, I surprised myself by saying, "That being the case, it is strange, is it not, that I cannot thank you more?"

"But you will," Laney answered, wiping her tears.

I did not go on deck the following day, as we were at this time only a day and a night out of Iquitos. Instead, I devoted myself, as Laney did, to making ready for our arrival in port.

I was glad enough to remain in the stateroom. Laney's prediction had proved accurate. I could not think of my last meeting with Captain Sorenson except with deep humiliation. And I thought about the meeting a great deal.

Had the captain been surprised at my embarrassingly-swift capitulation? Was he bemused? Such a possibility made me go hot with shame.

I wondered what I should say, how I should conduct myself when he made his customary call. This time he must visit our quarters, which gave me the advantage of being on my own territory.

I need not have concerned myself. Captain Sorenson made no call, even a brief one to say good-bye.

Through the open door of our statement, I occasionally saw him cross the deck, and I heard his voice issuing frequent orders. The *Toucan* was making her own preparations for arrival in Iquitos; the deck was humming with activity. Captain Sorenson must, of course, be busier than usual.

Yet Mr. Merriweather found time to call. When we invited him to be seated, he took a chair and remained with us well above an hour. It was the pleasantest of visits.

The following morning, Laney and I, ceremoniously summoned by Mr. Merriweather, came on deck in our handsomest traveling clothes, and found the *Toucan* wearing as much spit-and-polish as her peeling paint would allow. The red and white Peruvian ensign, which had replaced the Brazilian flag when we crossed into Peruvian waters, snapped in the sunny wind. The crew wore their usual tattered clothing, now freshly laundered. Captain Sorenson and Mr. Merriweather were resplendent in dress whites, the braid on their caps shining, every button on their uniforms gleaming.

The commander was standing near the gangway, but I managed, after the first glance, to keep him in the periphery of my vision. Which was fortunate, since I knew my humiliation could only be increased by looking directly at him.

No mater. In a few minutes I should be off the *Toucan* and seeing the last of him. Meanwhile, I wore my pride like a shining coat of mail.

The crew members, having finished stacking our luggage near the gangway for off-loading, were now lined up on deck. I went to them and bade them goodbye, shaking hands with each of them, using what Portuguese I knew.

Then it was time to deal with the commander. I crossed to him and, staring straight into one of those shining buttons on his jackets, extended a gloved hand.

"Thank you for a pleasant voyage, Captain Sorenson," I said cooly.

The commander took my hand but did not release it. I decided he would not do so until I looked at him. Having no wish to become involved in a tug-of-war, I glanced up.

I don't know what I expected. The storm-captain, his eyes narrowed with laughter? Commander Sorenson, preoccupied, remote? I saw neither. This was another man altogether, one I had not encountered before, one I did not understand.

He was neither laughing nor withdrawn, but curiously intent on all that was occurring around him. Yet I had the disconcerting notion his attention was divided, part of his intentness turned inward, focused on some destructive, secret problem of his own. There was a kind of haggard brilliance about him.

"Goodbye, Captain," I said, more gently than I had planned.

"Not goodbye, Julia," he answered, using my first name as though he were long accustomed to doing so, "*Au revoir*, only."

Startled, I did not know how to go on. Glancing sideways at Laney, I saw a flush come up in her cheeks and realized that the familiar use of my name had been responsible for this.

Hastily reverting to my cool manner, I said, "Perhaps it will be '*Au revoir*.' In a place the size of Iquitos I presume our paths may cross from time to time."

"Yes, our paths will cross," he answered in that same intent voice.

I turned away in confusion and Laney came forward and shook hands with the commander. She did not thank him for the voyage. She simply said goodbye.

She and I met at the top of the gangway, where Mr. Merriweather joined us. Assailed by an inexplicable sense of desolation, now that we were leaving the *Toucan*, I was glad that I need not tell Mr. Merriweather goodbye just yet. He was to escort us to our meeting with Patrick Courtney.

The rest of that day was quite dreadful and my first look at Iquitos came to nothing more than an anxious, superficial estimate of the scene before me.

I saw a floating village out from shore, linked by a narrow walkway to the iron wharf where we had docked; an unexpected, colonnaded promenade along the river; houses crowding up to the water; and behind the whole, a bluff with other houses, beautiful ones, scattered through the humid, dripping jungle that covered it.

Mr. Merriweather, Laney, and I had scarcely crossed the wharf and set foot on a pleasant, tree-shaded street before our troubles began. In the first moments, however, matters seemed right enough. This lively street appeared to be a general gathering place and the convenient spot to wait if meeting passengers from incoming ships. Anxiously scanning the crowd, I soon decided, however that there was not a person here who could possibly be Patrick Courtney.

Trying to hide my growing apprehension, I turned to Mr. Merriweather and said, "I am afraid my brother-in-law is not here."

"No, not in the street, but I am certain he is somewhere close by," he replied reassuringly. "Much business is conducted around the docks at this time of day, and it is likely that I shall find him somewhere in the crowd back on the wharf. Just remain here with Miss Laneford while I return and have a look about."

He took himself off and Laney remarked sourly, "I should think our fine Mr. Courtney could have foregone whatever business was at hand long enough to welcome a sister-in-law he has never seen to a place entirely foreign to her."

I thought so, too, but all I said was, "Perhaps it was business he could not forego."

But I kept a nervous watch on Mr. Merriweather as he made his way back to the far end of the wharf. There he joined a crowd of men I had not seen before.

These men appeard remarkably alike at this distance. They were European, and most of them wore white linen suits, cream silk shirts, black string cravats, and panama hats. A few among them had on riding breeches, open-necked shirts, and sun helmets. Without exception, their faces were burned a deep mahogany brown.

They looked prosperous and much preoccupied with whatever business they dealt in. I thought some of them must be the owners of rubber estates and of those beautiful houses on the bluff, others overseers and managers, perhaps. Rubber traders and speculators were undoubtedly represented.

Mr. Merriweather appeared to know them all. He moved in among them stopping to shake hands, to slap someone lightly on the shoulder in passing.

"Isn't that Captain Sorenson?" Laney asked abruptly.

"Where?"

"Beyond the group of men Mr. Merriweather joined."

Yes, it was Captain Sorenson. There was no mistaking him, even this far away. He was standing just off the wharf, beside a column of the promenade, engaged in earnest conversation with a regal black woman as tall as he. She was dressed in a white blouse and a billowy blue cotton skirt, with a swath of the same blue cotton wrapped around her head. Her looped golden earrings caught the sun. As we watched, Captain Sorenson took something from his pocket, folded it, and handed it to her.

"Money, I think," Laney said.

"Does it matter?" I asked rather desperately.

My nerves were frayed from my morning's experiences and from anticipation of what was to come. Everything seemed dreadfully puzzling and out of kilter. And we had barely arrived in Iquitos.

I deliberately forced my attention from Captain Sorenson back to Mr. Merriweather, who appeared to be making his inquiries as swiftly as possible. It was not long before he disengaged himself from the group and started back toward Laney and me.

He came alone, and I saw that a frown drew his brows together. My misgivings increased.

"Mr. Courtney is not here?" I asked, as he rejoined us.

"I did not find him on the wharf. But never mind. He can't be far away, because I see his carriage over there. It's the one with its wheels picked out in yellow. And his driver, Basílio, is among the men just under that first stand of palm trees. I shall inquire of him."

Mr. Merriweather went up the street and conferred with one of the drivers. When he returned, his frown was more pronounced than before.

"Basílio advises me that your brother-in-law has been called to Manaus for an urgent reason, but that he, Basílio, has been charged with meeting you and delivering you to *Los Vientos*.'

"Well, of all the ramshackle arrangements—" Laney began.

"Now don't fuss, Laney," I interrupted distractedly. "Why shouldn't this Basílio see us to *Los Vientos* just as satisfactorily as Patrick Courtney might have done? Certainly this driver would not have been given the responsibility of meeting us here were he not reliable in every way."

"This is true, Miss Laneford," Mr. Merriweather said. "As I've explained to Miss Scott, the *Los Vientos* servants have been with the Courtneys so long they can almost be counted as members of the family. You will be completely safe in Basílio's care."

I knew Mr. Merriweather's reassurances were not idle. But I had the feeling that he, too, thought Patrick Courtney might have served us better in this matter of our being met.

"Since you say so, Mr. Merriweather," Laney replied grudgingly.

Mr. Merriweather beckoned to Basílio, now perched on the driver's box of the yellow-wheeled carriage. Basílio waved back, slapped the reins along the horses' backs, rattled down the street to where we stood, and drew up. He jumped down smartly. He was a small man with snapping black eyes and shining black skin, neat as a new nail in his white coat and trousers.

When Mr. Merriweather introduced us, he removed his straw hat and bowed.

Laney nodded, and I smiled.

In an aside to Mr. Merriweather, I asked anxiously, "Does he speak English?"

"No, but he understands it, I am sure. Most servants in European households do. And you will readily understand his Portuguese from what I've taught you. So simply speak your own language, if necessary, and Basílio will answer in his, and the two of you will get on splendidly together. There. He has the small luggage loaded. Your trunks will follow shortly. And now I shall see you and Miss Laneford into your carriage, and you are to be comfortable about everything."

As Mr. Merriweather handed Laney and me into the carriage, I was assailed by a feeling not far removed from panic. Even with Laney beside me, I felt lonely and inadequate in this strange jungle city. As I settled into my seat I blinked my eyes to keep the tears back, just managing to regain some measure of composure before the goodbyes began.

"I wish you a happy reunion with your sister," Mr. Merriweather said, adding politely, "Remember me to Mrs. Courtney, if you will."

"Yes, indeed, I shall," I replied, scarcely knowing what I answered, unable to think of anything but the necessity of parting company with Mr. Merriweather.

The time had come, however, and there was nothing for it but to extend my hand and say, "I must thank you again for everything you have done for us, but I am hard pressed indeed to know how . . ."

"Then do not do so," he replied briskly, smiling at me as we shook hands. Then, he stepped back from the carriage, called something to Basílio, smiled at Laney and me once more, and replaced the cap on his head.

The carriage swung around and started up the street, rumbling along over the rough cobblestones. Soon we left the broad, cobbled street behind us, and were bumping up a narrow jungle road, so hemmed in by huge trees and rioting vines that the bright day was lost to us. There were mango trees, casaba, and palm. Vines were everywhere, festooning from limbs, twisting through thorn bushes, intertwining with themselves, closing our breeze and light, leaving us to travel through green shadows and boxed-in heat.

Sounds were subdued here. Yellow and black orioles flew songless through the moist air. A fluffy-faced monkey chattered once and grew still again.

"Oppressive," Laney said.

She appeared as depressed as I. We did not speak again, but bounced and

YOU

By Bessie McGill Stetson

You are the beauty
Of butterfly wings.
You are the music
The angels sing.

You are the glory
Of the sunset glow.
You are the silence
Of long, long ago.

swayed along for what seemed an age, but could have been only a matter of minutes.

At last, our carriage made a right turn into another road. This road was considerably wider, and, to my relief, I saw cleared open land at its end.

As we neared the end of the avenue of trees, Laney asked anxiously, "Are we approaching *Los Vientos* do you think?"

"No, I don't see how. There hasn't been sufficient time."

"Well, at least we are arriving somewhere, and any place would be an improvement over where we've just been."

I agreed, and when we emerged from the trees, I felt as though a weight had been lifted from me. I sat up and looked about.

Our road met a graveled drive which curved up to a rosy-pink building enclosed by a spiked fence. There were several carriages, much like ours, lined up in front of the building, waiting.

Inside the fence were deep-green lawns, and scattered about was an occasional cinnamon or papaya tree. Under the trees, violets as big as saucers grew in clusters. In the corners of the fenced enclosure, scarlet hibiscus flowers caught the sun and burned like hot coals.

Somewhere an unseen bird sang in a tree. I sat listening, pierced to the heart. I had never before heard the song of the *sabiá*, which is one of the most beautiful sounds in the world.

Laney peered out of the window of the carriage. "I can't make out this place."

At that moment, the doors of the pink buildings flew open, and children of all ages and sizes came pouring out. They ran shouting to the gates, flung them open, and tore off to their separate carriages.

A girl of perhaps six or seven years of age detached herself from the crowd and made for our carriage. Basílio leapt down from his box and opened the door for her. She entered the carriage like a whirlwind, shrugged a canvas bookbag from her shoulder, settled herself on the seat opposite, and fixed us with a ferocious frown.

Basílio slammed the door and, sticking his head back through the window, sent us a dazzling smile and announced happily, "Dominique!"

"Good heavens, what an extraordinary name. So Frenchy," Laney said, sounded faintly shocked. "Who are you, my dear?"

The child continued to stare at us fiercely and did not answer.

I, like Laney, was wondering who this silent, belligerent scrap of humanity might be. Basílio had announced her as though introductions were unnecessary. Perhaps he felt that surnames were unimportant where children were involved. Since she looked to be English, I could only think that she might be the daughter of one of Claire's neighbors, whom we were dropping off en route to *Los Vientos*.

Whoever she was, she was an unappealing mite, with a thin face and fiery red hair. The only attractive thing about her were her eyelashes, red and silky, so long they threw shadows on her cheeks. These lashes were at present half-lowered over eyes sparkling with hostility.

Why hostility?

Whatever her reasons, I was beginning to find her bad manners tiresome, and I thought it time introductions were insisted upon.

I said rather crisply, "My name is Julia, and this is Miss Laneford. Kindly tell us your name, please."

Domnique averted her face and spoke scornfully in Portuguese, *"Não falo Ingles."*

"What did she say?" Laney asked.

"She says that she does not speak English."

But I was almost certain she was lying.

What a disagreeable child. I found her unaccountably disturbing, but decided she was part and parcel of this unpleasant day. Nevertheless, I was determined not to be worsted by her. If she refused to speak English, then I should address her in Portuguese.

I sat thinking how my question must be put, then asked swiftly, *"Onde vai, menina?"*

"Os Ventos. É minha casa," she answered, her lashes sweeping up in surprise.

The next instant they lowered again. I could tell by the angry set of her mouth that she knew she had been tricked into speaking when she had not meant to.

"What was that all about, pray?" Laney asked.

"Dominique says that she goes all the way with us, that *Los Vientos* is her home."

"She lives in Claire's house, you say? No doubt she meant she lives on the estate. I shouldn't wonder if she is an overseer's daughter."

A flush came up in Dominique's still-averted face. Her lashes flickered and I knew she understood every word.

I felt uneasiness stir in me again, but my attention was diverted by seeing one of the carriages turn off into a private lane. After that, the carriages left us one by one.

Some distance further on, we ourselves stopped. In front of us was a great house set among emerald lawns and brightly-blooming flowers.

Basílio had scarcely reined the horses in before Dominique flung open the door of the carriage, jumped to the drive, raced up a walk and across the verandah of the house.

As she opened the front door and disappeared inside, we heard her calling, "I'm home, Dalma. I'm home."

"Dear me," Laney said, "that wretched child speaks English after all."

"Yes," I answered, my unease turning to a prickly foreboding.

Dominique had left her book bag lying on the floor of the carriage. I reached out and turned it over. Across its front, embroidered in brown-yarn letters was the name: *Dominique Courtney.*

For a long, uncomfortable moment Laney and I stared at the bookbag.

Laney spoke again, hesitantly, "Not an overseer's daughter, then, but a Courtney connection. Patrick's niece, or the child of a cousin, I expect . . ."

"Perhaps."

I felt a disagreeable flutter in my chest. I was remembering that Basílio had not introduced Dominique to us; he had expected us to know who she was. And Dominique's hair. A brilliant red. Claire had had such hair in childhood. It was only later that it darkened.

I picked up the book bag, lifted out a primer, and opened it with shaking fingers. In the upper corner of the inside of the cover as a neatly written identification.

Nome: Domnique Courtney
Domicílio: Los Vientos
Pais: Os senhor e a senhora Courtney

I sat completely still, clutching the book, unable to let go of it.

"What is it, Julia?"

"Dominique is not a Courtney cousin, nor is she a niece. She is Claire and Patrick's daughter."

Laney's face went ashen. "This is not possible."

"The proof is here, inside the book's cover."

"But how could Claire have had a daughter all these years and never spoken of her to us?"

"I do not know," I said through rigid lips.

Once out of the carriage, the three of us crossed to a wrought iron gate set in a fence of carved stone. Basílio, opening the gate for us, said in his economical way, *"Los Vientos."*

The Courtney residence was of great size, its atmosphere one of colonial splendor. Vast lawns were enclosed by the stone fence we had passed thorugh. Behind the house, and some distance away, rose the verdant, dripping jungle.

We went up a graveled walk to the wide verandah. This verandah, supported by colonnades, ran the full length of the front of the house, which swept away in two wings from a carved door. The door, made of a satiny wood almost black in color, was surrounded by a facing of blue tiles.

Hot, murmuring winds sang across the verandah. A cloud of golden wisteria, tumbling from the roof at one end, swung to and fro. A white lizard ran across one of my shoes and disappeared in a crack between the tiles.

Basílio went to the front door and banged on a brass knocker. When the door opened, he stepped aside, bowed us into the house, nodded toward the maid who stood before us, and said, "Teresa."

Teresa was slight, had coffee-and-cream skin, and sloe-eyes that refused to meet mine. She wore the white blouse and full cotton skirt I was beginning to recognize as a servant's dress.

Murmuring *"Boa tarde,"* in a melting voice, she moved back into the shadows of a large entrance hall, which I was to come to know as the *galeria*.

This room was two stories high, and had magnificent paneled doors, one in the left wall, one in the right. In the third wall, opposite the front door, was an arched opening; through it I could see a corner of gleaming hallway, which I thought must lead into the central section of the downstairs area. A staircase, so graceful and fragile-looking that it seemed to hang in air, curved off to one side and up to a second-floor landing.

I replied to Teresa's greeting, and turning back to Basílio, said anxiously in English, "Could someone please announce to Mrs. Courtney that Miss Laneford and I are here. We wish to see her immediately—"

"*No, senhorita,*" Basílio interrupted in Portuguese, apparently understanding my English perfectly, "*Não é possível.*"

"But surely Mrs. Courtney left word we were to be brought to her the minute we arrived!"

"*Não, senhorita,*" he repeated stubbornly.

He went on to explain, enunciating every word as though he were speaking to a none-too-bright child, that it was nearing the *sesta* hour, not a proper time to present ourselves. He suggested that we must be fatigued after our wait on the wharf and our journey to *Los Vientos*. We were to follow Teresa to our rooms, where we would refresh ourselves with luncheon and a rest. He said all this in an exceedingly firm voice.

Disagreeably surprised, I translated for Laney as best I could.

"Perhaps it's just as well," Laney replied bitterly. "I am not certain I am ready to see Claire just yet."

Although I fretted at the delay, I was not certain I was quite ready myself.

My feelings about facing Claire were ambivalent—dread at what I might see in the first moment (had the fever eaten her beauty away?), offset by a burning need to talk to her, to discover how matters stood with her.

Overlaying such grown-up considerations was a simple, childish impulse. I had come a long way, had reached my sister at last. I longed to go tearing through the house, much in the manner of Dominique, shouting, "Claire, we're here! We're here!"

Impossible, of course. With Basílio standing by looking as though he would brook no further argument from me, there was nothing for Laney and me to do but bid him good afternoon and follow Teresa, who was already leading us toward the staircase.

As we went up the stairs, I saw that they were made of the black-satin wood I had first noticed in the front door. I traced my finger along the lovely glowing surface of the banister, wondering about this wood. Later I learned that it came from the jacaranda tree, which I had seen growing in such glorious lavender profusion in the forests of the Amazon. We followed Teresa across the landing and into another hallway. The walls were paneled glossy and lined with scores of brass sconces. The floors felt glassy underfoot, and I imagined at night this place would become a hall of light, glittering with reflections.

Now there was no illumination except a stream of sunlight from an open, shuttered door at the end of the hall. The carved doors we passed along the way were closed.

When we reached the last two doors, directly across from each other, Teresa opened one of them, stepped aside, and murmured, "*Passe, faz favor.*"

We crossed the threshold and found ourselves in a spacious apartment. There was a sitting room with what appeared to be two bedchambers leading off from its far end. On the jungle side of the room, white-shuttered doors opened onto a wrought iron balcony where a woven hammock with white tassels hung.

Except for the few delicate dark wood pieces, the sitting room was starkly white, with white walls and low couches upholstered in white chintz. The floors were of polished tile, the only covering an occasional ocelot skin.

There were no pictures here, only mirrors framed in dark wood. On one wall was a straw hanging, so intricately wrought that it looked like lace. A black jaguar, frozen in mid-leap, sprang across it. Stone jars filled with blood-red roses stood about the room.

I crossed the sitting room and opened a door into one of the bedroms. The same arresting simplicity prevailed here.

I returned to the sitting room to find Teresa gone and Laney removing the hatpin from her severe navy straw. Her face, in the tropical glare, showed lines I had not seen before.

"There is some mistake about that child," Laney said, as though our conversation concerning Dominique had never been interrupted. "Claire could not have had a daughter without telling us."

"Well, she must have," I replied a little caustically. This dreadful Alice-in-Wonderland sort of day had me at my wit's end. "Dominique has Claire's eyes and hair and her name is Courtney." I untied the veiling that anchored my hat and, without even looking around, threw the hat in the direction of a chair. "There is no mistake."

"You are right, of course," Laney answered, capitulating abruptly and looking so stricken that I was immediately contrite. "I think I knew almost as soon as you,but I could not bring myself to . . . Such a child!"

Poor Laney. So far from home. And everything so wrong here. For the first time I questioned whether I had done her a grave disservice in shielding her from the full import of Claire's final letter. Had she been on her guard, wouldn't she have been better prepared to sustain the shocks that seemed to be an adjunct of our arrival in Iquitos?

"Do sit down and rest, Laney," I suggested anxiously. "We shall be having a bite soon—"

A tap at the door interrupted me, and Teresa entered with a light, appetizing luncheon, which she served to us at the round table in the sitting room. Laney and I did our best to eat, but could not manage more than a few bites.

During lunch a servant named José appeared with our trunks. Teresa, who was making me nervous standing attentively by while I pushed my food about, disappeared into the bedrooms to unpack.

Laney seemed as relieved as I at her going. We took ourselves off to another part of the room and sat down on a couch. A low table in front of us held coffee in a fat china pot.

"I am certain," I said as briskly as I could, "that when we reach Claire, everything will come clear in this matter of Dominique. Claire will, of course, have an explanation . . ."

Though what the explanation could

possibly be, I could not fathom.

Laney answered restlessly, "Even so, I think it will be at least another hour and a half before those lazy servants bestir themselves. And still longer before they seek us out again."

This, however, was not the case.

Teresa had scarcely cleared away and departed before we heard another rap at the door. Laney and I looked at each other; then I called out in considerable excitement, "*Passe, passe, faz favor.*"

The door swung open. I stared at the person standing there. I knew by Laney's silence that she was as stunned as I, so I could not be mistaken in my identification.

The woman on the threshold was the beautiful, regal Negress we had seen Captain Sorenson talking with on the wharf this morning.

"Good afternoon, *senhorita, senhora*," she said in excellent English. "I am the housekeeper at *Los Vientos*. My name is Dalma."

Unable to reply, I sat trying to get my bearings on another unsettling event.

Surely it was an odd circumstance that Captain Sorenson (who had pretended only the most casual connection with the Courtneys) should have left the *Toucan* this morning immediately after Laney's and my departure, hurrying off to an obviously prearranged and pressing meeting with a servant from the Courtney household.

To be in such close touch with Claire's servant meant that he knew this household well. Yet he had gone to some pains to indicate otherwise. Why had he lied?

I felt a familiar icy breath cross me. That chilled wind from the *Toucan* that I thought I had left behind me forever, had followed me into Claire's house.

Laney spoke at last. "Good afternoon. Please come in."

I watched Dalma cross the room toward us. She moved like a dancer, and her unusual height gave her distinction. As she drew nearer I saw that she had wide dark eyes, and a dusky, glowing skin. I could not guess her age.

She stopped in front of us. "I have come to make myself known to you, in the event that I might be of service."

The words were those of a servant. The manner was not.

Recovering myself, at last, I replied stiffly, "It was good of you to call on us so promptly. And I should like to ask something of you straightaway."

Dalma inclined her head.

"We are most impatient to see Mrs. Courtney. Immediately after she wakes from her *sesta* would you tell her that we wish to visit."

Dalma glanced away. After an overlong pause, she answered, "*Senhora* Courtney cannot be visited."

I stared at her. "Whatever can you mean?"

"She is not at present in this house."

"I do not believe you," I replied, my voice leaping with fresh shock. "She has known the date of our arrival for many weeks."

"I have here a letter from *Senhor* Courtney. He asked me to deliver it as soon as you reached *Los Vientos*. I was told to say this letter would make clear all circumstances concerning the *senhora*'s absence."

Still speaking in an embarrassingly uneven voice, I asked, "Why were we not advised of Mrs. Courtney's absence the moment we arrived here?"

"As you see, the other servants have no English for explaining. *Senhor* Courtney said I must be the one to bring the letter to tell you the *senhora* was not here. I came as soon as you and Miss Laneford had refreshed yourselves."

Dalma finished delivering her devastating message in the serenest of voices. Either she did not know, or did not care, what this message meant to Laney and me.

I looked across at Laney, who had not spoken during this exchange. Her face was dead-white again.

"Give me the letter, please," I said.

Dalma took a letter from her pocket and extended it. I saw that my hand trembled as I reached out.

"Thank you. That will be all for the present."

"There is a bellpull by each bed. By that means you can summon me."

Dalma turned and left us, gone like a whispering wind.

I examined the square, cream envelope she had given me, holding it with stinging fingers. My name was written in black letters across its face. With a quick, violent movement I tore it open, pulled two folded pages from the envelope, and began to read aloud.

My dear Julia,

I deeply regret to report that today, a fortnight before your arrival in Iquitos, Claire's fever worsened suddenly, alarming me to such a degree that I feel I must take her to hospital in Manaus, tomorrow, leaving by the fastest riverboat available in the morning.

There she will be under the care of a splendid physician, receiving every attention possible. I shall keep you constantly advised of her progress.

I hope you and Miss Laneford may be comfortable in our absence. Our housekeeper, Dalma, speaks English, Basilio understands it and speaks a few words, all of our servants are totally reliable. You have but to call upon them.

So that you need not feel lonely in Iquitos, I have informed friends from both the Booth Line and the British consulate of your imminent arrival at Los Vientos. *I hope that they may be calling soon after you are settled in.*

Claire earnestly requests that I send her love to you both, and bids you try not to worry. She feels now that she is going to hospital, she will manage a quick and complete recovery, and will not be long in being reunited with you.

Your obedient servant,
Patrick

I folded the letter, too shocked to speak. Incredible disappointment, but more than disappointment—once again I felt the embrace of familiar fears.

Curiously coincidental, was it not, that Claire's health had declined so drastically just before Laney and I reached Iquitos? Was the "splendid physician" in Manaus the same doctor Claire had mentioned when she first wrote of her illness, the one she disliked so much? Disliked because she distrusted him, perhaps?

This thought turned my breath sharp in my throat; and I averted my face so that Laney might not see my agitation. It was enough that she must deal with her own disappointment, enough for her to know the worsening state of Claire's health.

(Worsening for what reason? I asked myself, prickling with new alarm.)

"Laney," I said with an effort, "I know your disappointment, but I expect Patrick is right. Claire is more likely to make a complete recovery in hospital than under routine care at home."

(Then why was she not taken to hospital before? Had she refused to go because she was afraid? If so, what had changed her mind?)

"I am persuaded you are right."

The answer was so faint that I looked swiftly at Laney. She was pressing her fingers to her temples in a familiar gesture.

"Oh, dear," I said unhappily, "it's one of your headaches?"

"I'm afraid so."

I leaped to my feet and went to her. Laney's headaches were always a matter of concern to me; but (and this was a measure of the turmoil Patrick's letter had thrown me in), on this one occasion, I almost welcomed the opportunity to see her off to bed.

I needed desperately to be alone, to reread and reevaluate that nerve-tingling communication from my brother-in-law. It seemed to me, even in my first alarmed reading of the letter, that there was a wrongness in it.

"I believe I must lie down for a bit . . ." Laney was saying.

"Of course you must. And I shall bathe your forehead and make you as comfortable as possible. Perhaps some of your drops this time?"

Hardly aware of what I was saying, I continued talking as I helped her to her room, and out of her dress and corset. I threw back the coverlet and turned the pillow. She lay down on the immaculate undersheet with a sigh of relief, sighing again when I bathed her temples with rose water. Then I brought her drops, and when she finished taking them, I placed a cool compress on her head.

When all was done and I was about to leave her, I said carefully, "Patrick and Clare must have reached Manaus by now, with time to spare. I shouldn't wonder if we have news by wireless quite soon."

"Perhaps tomorrow," Laney answered, but her voice sounded sad and far away.

I felt tears sting my eyes and I leaned down and kissed a grey cheek. "Dear Laney . . ."

"We shall come about, Julia," Laney murmured, already drowsy.

"Of course we shall. I am certain of it."

But I was not certain of anything.

Reaching my room, I flung off my outer garments, loosened my tightly-pinned hair, and threw myself down on the bed. I was holding the letter, which I had fished from the pocket of my discarded frock; and I unfolded it as though the pages were hot to the touch.

As I reread the letter, my heart began to pound with a heavy, painful beat. There was no question about the wrongness. Somewhere. What was it?

I began a third reading, reconsidering every word. And then I knew.

This was not the letter of a man upset by a distressing development, one crowded into a quick decision. No urgent scrawl, this. It was a precise document, every word weighed and neatly set in place. It was totally out of tone with the situation described.

Premeditated. Contrived.

Dreadfully frightened, I tried to order my thoughts, to decide what to do. Should I return to Manaus and seek Claire out in hospital?

It took only a moment's reflection to realize such a move was not possible.

The *Toucan* had departed, and it would be extremely difficult for me to arrange other, suitable passage unassisted. I should have to call on someone from the Booth Lines. This would involve introductions, awkward explanations, possible delays in starting out. And afterward, ten more difficult days on the Amazon.

Even if I were up to this, Laney was not. And I could not leave her alone in this place, ill, upset by Claire's absence, trying to fend for herself among these mysterious servants who came and went as silently as reflections in a mirror.

Even if I could somehow establish Laney differently and return to Manaus alone, it was possible I should fail to see Claire, after all. How easy for the doctor to declare a patient too ill to receive visitors. Or what if my capricious brother-in-law, hearing of my coming, decided it was time to bring Claire home? Then she and I would once again pass on the Amazon.

There was nothing to do but stay on at *Los Vientos* and wait. It would not be easy, waiting. But beset by so many uncertainties, I dared not make a move at present. Such a move might prove disastrous.

Exhausted by the day's anxieties, lulled by increasing heat, I closed my eyes and drifted into an uneasy half-sleep. But the worrying went on.

On the edge of deeper sleep, my eyes flew open and I jerked up on one elbow. I had recognized something else wrong in Patrick's letter.

He had introduced Dalma, explained about Basílio and the other servants, written of guests who might call, listing, it seemed, everyone we could possibly meet at *Los Vientos*.

But he, like Claire, had not once mentioned his own daughter, Dominique.

I slept at last, awakened late in the afternoon by a crash of thunder. Bursts of lightning flashed in the dark air beyond the balcony. Raindrops hit with such force that they broke like shattering glass. A cold wind came through the open doors, and I remained on the bed, unrefreshed by my heavy sleep, grateful for the coolness crossing me. Five minutes later the rain ceased, the sun came out, the earth steamed. Macaws resumed their ancient quarrels.

I got to my feet with an effort, went to the washstand, poured water from the lovely fragile pitcher, and washed. As I brushed and repinned my hair, I saw something from the corner of my eye that cheered me.

There was a bouquet on the dressing table, a rather lopsided one, with the stems of the flowers crowded into a cracked earthenware vase. Someone had left a gift for me while I slept.

I crossed the room and stood looking at a mass of glorious, exotic blossoms. The flowers, unlike any I had ever seen, were a brilliant yellow, heavily flecked with brown. Their tissue-thin petals curved back upon themselves; their delicate brown stamens waved gently.

Leaning down for a closer view, I saw that not only the stamens of the flowers moved. The entire bouquet was quivering. Yellow spiders, their bodies dotted with brown spots, crawled in and out of the fluted blossoms. The flowers were alive with insects, all perfectly matched to their hosts.

With a cry I picked up the vase, ran across the room and threw the hideous bouquet across the balcony. Flowers and spiders spilled onto the lawn. The insects trembled upright and lurched about, lost on their terrible, thread-like legs.

Who had brought such a "gift" to my room? Were the spiders dangerous? I did not think so, since it had been necessary for someone to handle the flowers before leaving them for me. And the insects could be detected upon close examination. A most uncertain way of disposing of one's enemies, surely. The whole thing smacked of a malicious, cruel trick.

A cracked vase, a listing flower arrangement. The handiwork of a child, I thought, a child who had prepared a bouquet of spiders to welcome me. I imagined her readying her offering, humming as she worked, not minding that insects crawled blindly across her hands, in and out betwen her fingers.

Dominique.

She was the only child who would have access to my room as I slept. Certainly the servant's children would not be allowed here. I recalled the disagreeable ride home, her deliberate bad manners, her sly, adult pretense that she did not speak English, the veiled eyes watching.

At that moment I glanced across the room and caught a fleeting reflection in the washstand mirror. So the culprit had remained outside the door, the better to savor the aftermath of her mischief.

"Come in, Dominique," I said coldly.

Silence.

Then, elaborately casual, she slipped into the room and walked about. There was a tiny, secret smile on her lips.

"Did you leave the flowers with the spiders on my dressing table?"

She pretended not to hear and continued her aggravating stroll. Suddenly she swung around, saying tauntingly, "You were scared of the spiders. You made a funny noise and ran and threw them over the balcony."

"No," I lied. "I threw the flower away because I do not like ugly things."

Her beautiful lashes swept up, golden eyes gleamed maliciously. "You were scared," she insisted, the smile widening.

I longed to shake her. "Do you know who I am, Dominique?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied darkly. "You are my aunt. But I don't like you."

"Why not?"

She shrugged indifferently.

"You may leave," I said, "since you do not have the courtesy to answer me."

My dislike must have rung hard and clear, because, for the first time, Dominique seemed taken aback.

"Leave," I repeated.

I got to my feet, walked to the balcony and stood looking out at a red-orange hibiscus tree, flaming like a torch in the distance.

There was no sound of movement behind me. I turned to find Domnique staring at a pile of books I had brought to Claire. Teresa had unpacked them and stacked them on a table.

The volume on top was a battered copy of *The Wind in the Willows.* It belonged to Claire, but it had been loved by both of us.

In a sentimental moment I had included it with the other books, as a talisman, thinking, too, it would conjure up memories of two children in a flower-scented English garden, laughing together over Mr. Toad's wild antics. Surely such memories could not fail to cheer someone ill in a distant land.

It appeared that Dominique might stand forever looking at the cover of the book, and I'd had quite enough of her for one day. "I asked you to leave," I said. "March."

She faced me again, glowering. "I shan't leave unless I take that book with me."

"You will take nothing. And you are not to come to this room again until you come to apologize."

I returned to my study of the lawns.

After a time I heard a small voice, "What is this 'apologize'?"

Well might she ask. Never heard the word, of course.

"It means that when you are ready to say you are sorry for your extremely bad behavior, which has gone on since we met this morning, perhaps then we can talk together."

I waited. A minute or two passed and there was a soft sound behind me. Dominique was gone.

I returned to my chair and sat down, shaken by her visit, shamed by my dislike of my own niece. A cunning and bewildering child. A true daughter of this house of winds and mirrors. Had she always been this way?

For a long time, I decided. Her expert methods bespoke years of practice; and her dislike of Laney and me, on sight, seemed to indicate that adults were her enemies automatically. At least adults from the world I represented, the world of authority. She might simply be a rather terrible child, who hated without reason. There were such children, of course.

I could not on the strength of two meetings, disagreeable as they were, consign Dominique to such a group. The more I considered, the more convinced I became that Domnique had excellent reasons for being as she was.

Since she remained unacknowledged by either parent, she could not be loved by them. It was as though Patrick and Claire, from the moment she was born, had entered into a conspiracy to deny her existence. Why?

To my surprise, I was beginning to find my sympathies engaged in Dominique's behalf. And dislike her or not, I felt a growing sense of responsibility toward her. I wondered if she had any friends, anyone at all.

She and Basílio seemed on excellent terms, but there must be a woman servant to see to her care and creature comforts. Who was in charge of this strange child?

Remembering her rush through the front door this morning, and her shout for Dalma, I thought I knew who this person was. The enigmatic housekeeper. I rose to my feet, crossed to the bed, pulled the bell cord, then stood anxiously considering how to discover what I wished to know.

I reckoned Dalma to be secretive and clever. I would learn nothing by direct interrogation. I must throw her off guard, force her to reveal her feelings about Dominique. By the time she appeared in the doorway, my plan was made.

"Senhorita?"

"Would you be good enough," I asked quietly, "to go to the balcony and look over the banister? Then tell me what you see."

If Dalma thought this an odd request, she gave no sign. Her straw slides murmuring silkily as she walked, she crossed the room to the balcony and glanced over the railing.

When she turned back, she said coolly, "Flowers of the senna tree, *senhorita.*"

For all her coolness, I thought I heard unease in her voice. Were such spidery offerings familiar to her?

"These flowers, complete with spiders, were left in my room while I slept. A bouquet of them."

Dalma's creamy-dark lids half lowered over her eyes.

"You were in no danger from the spiders. They live always in the senna blossoms and are harmless."

Her reply, faintly contemptuous, was designed to sting. I had not underestimated her cleverness.

"I decided that the insects were harmless, but I was not certain of this when I discovered the flowers. An unpleasant trick for a child to play."

A flash in the slitted eyes. "Dominique did not leave the flowers."

"But I did not accuse Dominique."

Dalma looked as though she regretted her too quick response. I knew she had been alerted the instant the word "child" entered our exchange, but she had lost her bearings in an impulsive, automatic defense of Dominique. I noted this with satisfaction.

At the same time, I knew I had not endeared myself to Dalma with my trick. Her eyes were open now, gleaming with hostility. The time had come to retreat.

But I had learned what I started out to discover. Dominique had at least one powerful ally in this house.

I said quickly, "I questioned Dominique and found she brought the flowers. No harm done, however. I think she did not realize her gift might disturb a foreign visitor who does not know one spider from another."

I paused, then continued with care, "Perhaps her nurse should explain to her that such flowers are not a proper present for someone new to Iquitos."

"I shall explain to her," Dalma replied jealously. "I am her nurse."

"Splendid. I did not realize this was the case. I am glad to know she is in such good hands in the parents' absence."

"Dominique has always been in my hands." Again the note of jealousy. "Even when her parents were present. I came with her as her *babá* from Manaus. She had, at that time, only one month."

I answered in the lightest voice I could manage. "Then this matter need not concern me further. I shall leave it to you. Thank you, Dalma."

She inclined her head in her graceful way, glided across the room and out the door. I watched her go, hoping I had placated her at the last.

Dalma would make a formidable enemy, one capable of cutting me off from Dominique completely, if she chose. I must not let this happen.

However reluctantly I might approach my task, I had no choice now but to try to establish some connection with my difficult niece, try to understand this alien child, to help her if I could. My conscience demanded this of me. I could not pass her by with averted face, as Claire and Patrick had done.

With Laney still sleeping, I took tea alone that afternoon; and after Teresa cleared up and departed in her soundless way, I went restlessly to the open doors of the balcony and looked out, seeking distraction. The view before me was one I had not seen. Not far from the house was the jungle. Beyond the lawns on my left, I saw the flash of a river through a stand of trees.

On the river was a floating pavilion, reached by a plank walkway extending out from shore. The pavilion appeared an inviting place, with its open sides, with river breezes lifting the fringes of the palm-frond roof. A courtyard was outside the kitchens and directly across from it were servants' quarters, a line of neat one-room houses. Rows of jacaranda trees, runing down each of the other two side, completed the limits of the enclosure.

Such a pleasant, noisy place. Servants moved back and forth between the kitchens and their quarters. Children played, or worked at small tasks. Through the open door of one of the cabins, I saw a woman ironing rhythmically; from the roof of this same cabin flaming pink orchids fell in a cascade. A black myna bird, chained to a stand, cocked his head when a girl passed by and squawked in an outrageous mixture of Spanish and Portuguese, *"Bon dia, guapa!"*

But the sight that interested me most was that of a red-haired child lying in a hammock swung between two trees. She was holding a book in front of her, so I could not see her face; but her body, which I remembered as rigid and sharp-cornered, melted softly into the contours of the hammock. She looked happy and at home, swinging gently in the hot wind, half-covered with jacaranda blossoms.

So this was where Dominique came for solace when the day's battles were over. But how soon she would outgrow this warm, childhood cocoon. Then where in the hostile, grown-up world she had warred against so long, but must enter finally, would she find a peaceful corner?

Disturbed again, I turned away, wondering how to occupy myself through the empty evening ahead. As I recrossed the balcony, it occurred to me that with the servants preoccupied in the kitchens and the courtyard, this would be a splendid time to explore the remainder of the house.

I left my room and descended to the main floor. As I expected, the gallery was deserted, its corners beginning to thicken with shadows. Wind came from a open window giving onto the verandah, billowing an emerald silk curtain, filling the air with movement and nerve-racking whispers.

The two doors on either side of the *galeria* were closed. The arch under the stars was filled with fading light. I hesitated, then crossed the gallery to the door on my left, and opened it. I stood on the threshold of a formal dining room, which was quite beautiful and not in the least alarming.

Oriental rugs were spread on floors laid in alternating strips of light and dark wood, more emerald silk cushioned the chairs, a glossy black sideboard stood against a white wall, a chandelier of Venetian crystal hung like a jewel over the dark, highly-polished dining table.

I left the dining room and crossed to the door opposite, and threw it wide. The drawing room. In the first moment, I saw only three things: another blazing chandelier; beyond french doors, a garden where a splashing fountain held the image of a myrtle tree; and on the farthest wall, at the end of the room, a portrait of Claire.

I was aware of the fountain and chandelier peripherally, noting their dramatic flash in passing but it was the portrait that dominated the room. The painting was in the style of the Flemish school, the background muted, the only light coming from the upper left of the canvas. Diffused, radiant, it fell across Claire's shoulder, defining the corner of the chair she sat in, touching the rich folds of her brown velvet grown, tracing with luminous spareness the burnished hair, the up-tilt of the wicked, golden eyes, the curve of her taunting smile.

How exquisite she was. A siren, who stole men's souls away.

What sort of man was Patrick Courtney that he could win her where so many others had failed? I stood on, studying the portrait until a gust of wind sent the door behind me crashing shut. Claire and I were alone together among the lengthening shadows.

Suddenly I swung around, jerked open the door, and lifting my skirts ran across the gallery and fled up the stairs.

The folowing morning, Laney and I ate breakfast on the shady balcony, facing into burning sunlight, and it was not long before she began to droop. Pointing out the pavilion to her, I suggested we might pass the morning there.

Seeing her revive at the prospect of a cool retreat, I asked Teresa if we could go to the river house. She said she would accompany us, and show us the path to the river.

Soon after breakfast we began gathering books, sunshades, and Laney's needlework, preparing for our visit to the pavilion. Just before we set out, however, Dalma appeared at our door and announced that I had a caller.

"*Senhora* Carlson, *Senhorita*. She is at present in the morning room. I shall show you the way."

"Someone Patrick invited to call, no doubt," Laney said, without interest.

"Oh, dear. Now I shall have to stay here instead of going to the river. But you must continue as planned."

Laney seemed delighted that there was no need for her to remain behind and departed with Teresa.

In spite of my regret at missing my jaunt, I found my curiosity piqued at meeting one of Claire's and Patrick's friends. I followed Dalma down to the first floor, and to the morning room. It was a place of glancing sunlight and cool, pure blues. Azurine couches, airy cane-bottomed chairs, handwoven white rugs, all seemed light enough to float away. Everywhere about the room were robin's-egg blue bowls filled with masses of magnolias.

As I advanced into the room, an unusual personage rose from one of the couches, and surveyed me through a lorgnette. Behind the lorgnette, her brown eyes snapped with interest. I looked back at her, every bit as interested as she.

She wore an outdated dress of puce-colored crêpe, with the assurance of someone who had no doubts about herself. Her skin was sallow, her weathered cheeks rouged. Her hat, enormous and wide-brimmed, was so covered in egret feathers and ostrich plumes that it looked like a large bird resting on her head. I could scarcely drag my fascinated glance away—I half expected the hat to take flight.

In spite of her bizarre appearance, there was an air of distinction about my visitor, and I felt her scrutiny came from warm curiosity, not rudeness.

"Good morning," I said, smiling.

At my greeting, she behaved most peculiarly. Closing the lorgnette, she dropped it into the beaded reticule hanging on her wrist, and to my amazement, came to meet me with outstretched hands.

"My dear Julia!" she exclaimed, her eyes filling with easy tears.

I was completely taken aback, but I met her halfway and took her hands in mine. Before I could get a word out, she leaned forward and kissed my cheek. This so startled and pleased me that I silently named her my friend.

"Mrs. Carlson, I believe. I am deli—"

"You must call me Angela, darling Julia. You see your mama was one of my dearest friends! I discovered just this morning who you are, the daughter of Christine Scott, my closest companion at Miss Winwood's Select School for Young Females—such a long time ago!

"The sight of you, so like her when she was your age—so *very* like her—has quite overset me, I'm afraid . . ." My guest ended with a gasp and dabbed at her eyes with a wisp of handkerchief.

I said hurriedly, "What a lovely circumstance! I had not thought to meet a friend of my mother's so far from England. But please come and sit down. Wouldn't you like to remove your gloves? And perhaps your—er—hat?"

"How comfortable you are, my dear. Once again, like your mother. I shall take off my gloves, at least. The heat is prodigious, is it not?"

"Quite dreadful. I must ring for something to refresh us."

But Dalma, anticipating me, arrived with cooled drinks in tall crystal glasses. The drink was *maracujá,* a refreshing fruit concoction, pinkish-orange in color, topped with crisps sprigs of mint.

"Splendid," Angela sighed, stripping off her gloves, and reaching for a glass from the proffered tray. She thanked Dalma, at the same time taking her in from head to toe in one expert glance.

Dalma murmured, "*Por nada, senhora,*" passed the second glass to me and was gone.

As we settled into separate corners of the couch, I said impulsively, "I am so glad my brother-in-law asked you to call on me."

"Your brother-in-law?" Angela said, evidently at a loss. "Did he? Patrick Courtney, yes let me see," and then brightening, she added, "Of course he did! Saw him on the street and he mentioned that Mrs. Courtney's sister was arriving in Iquitos, asked me to call, said Mrs. Courtney was off to Manaus for treatment for a fever. How is she?"

I felt my throat go dry and took a swallow of my *maracujá* before I answered, "I have not heard as yet."

"But you will soon, no doubt. Troublesome things, fevers. I, myself, am subject to an occasional bout of malaria, but, of course, there is the quinine for that. But no more of fevers. What were we talking about, my dear? Oh, yes, how Mr. Courtney asked me to visit. To be perfectly honest I quite forget he had done so. And to think I might have missed you!"

I was finding Angela's conversation somewhat difficult to follow, but aspects of it were clear enough. It was obvious from the way she had inspected Dalma, from the way her eyes now darted curiously about the room, that she had never visited *Los Vientos* until today. It was also apparent, since she did not at any time refer to Patrick and Claire except as "Mr. Courtney" and "Mrs. Courtney," that her acquaintance with them had not ripened into friendship.

"If you did not come to see me at Patrick's suggestion, then how . . ."

"It was James Merriweather's doing. Came bursting in on me yesterday morning, startling me out of my wits—didn't even know the creature was in town, mind you!—explaining how he came to know you on the *Toucan* saying I must call on you immediately. All most disjointed and confusing, and not a proper visit at all. Dashed right off, insisting he had a number of things to see to before the *Toucan* left port. Silly business matters, I suppose."

I could not resist a smile.

"Mr. Merriweather was much pressed for time yesterday morning, I assure you. But how like him to snatch a moment to make me known to you, so that I might have a new friend in a strange place," I said warmly.

"Oh, he's a dear boy, certainly. But somewhat heedless, wouldn't you say? Gave me the information about Greenfields and Virginia Water in such a rackety maner that I was halfway to *Los Vientos* before I realized you were Christina's daughter."

But, not knowing this, you came, I thought. At Mr. Merriweather's request. The same request from Patrick Courtney, you "forgot." And because I was Christine Scott's daughter I was "dear Julia," while Claire, also of "Greenfields" in Virginia Water was "Mrs. Courtney."

It appeared that society on the Amazon was highly striated and that Angela (at least by her own precepts) was social arbiter of one of the more rarefied striations. It also was apparent that Claire and Patrick did not move at this level, but that Mr. Merriweather did. This accounted for his not being on closer terms with the Courtneys.

Claire, I knew, would not have cared a fig for any of this. She had undoubtedly rejected the English group as circumscribed and stifling. Her demands were sophisticated; she would require a more eclecic and colorful set, possibly among the continental Europeans.

I, on the other hand, having spent all of my life in the pleasant but narrow confines of a village, felt much at home in the restricted world of a small English colony on the Amazon. I doubted if the intricate subtleties of social life in Iquitos differed greatly from those of Virginia Water; and I could not help but be entertained by these subtleties, especially as presently described by my eccentric caller.

Settling down to enjoy myself, I inquired if Angela knew Mr. Merriweather well.

"Well?" she repeated, startled. "I assure you, Julia, I have known him since he was in short pants. Our families are particularly intimate."

She reached for her *maracujá,* took a resounding swallow, and continued, "My husband Michael, who is director of the Booth Line in Iquitos—a most competent man, mind, but boring on occasion," here she sent me a merry, clownish smile, "but then most men are, don't you think? Let's see, where was I? Oh, yes. The Merriweathers. Michael and James's father have known each other since Michael and I first came to the Amazon, thirty years ago. And I am excessively fond of James's mother, Margaret."

Then, with one of her unexpected conversational switches, she fixed me with a bright eye and asked, "What do you think of James?"

"I think he is splendid," I answered without hesitation or embarrassment.

"And Captain Sorenson?"

"I don't really believe I know," I answered, unaccountably flustered.

"Precisely. A most mysterious man. When all's said and done, who is he?"

"I know him only as the commander of the *Toucan*," I replied, completely at a loss.

"Oh, that. I meant, who is he in England? What are his connections there?"

"I afraid I have no idea."

"Of course you have not. No one has. But such matters are extremely important if one wants to move in certain circles out here."

The very conclusion I had come to, but considering some of the circles I suspected the captain of moving in, I could only say, "I do not think this would be a first consideration with Captain Sorenson."

"Exactly. And that is what is so provoking about him. Because, you see, he is totally accepted everywhere!"

Highly amused by the captain's undeserved social success, I inquired of Angela how he had arrived at this exalted position.

"Well, for one thing he is James Merriweather's friend," Angela replied bitterly.

"So if one is a friend of the Merriweathers . . . ?"

"Oh, yes. Not only is their English background impeccable, but they have been on the Amazon for three generations. Their rubber properties outside Manaus are not extensive, but beautifully managed and successful. They are splendid people—known and liked all up and down the river . . ."

"I find myself puzzled, however. Mr. Merriweather and the captain did not seem overtly friendly on the *Toucan*. Their manner toward each other was formal. Mr. Merriweather invariably deferred to the commander."

"Shipboard traditions and a pack of nonsense. They are thick as thieves on land and have been ever since public school days in England. How they present themselves aboard the *Toucan* has nothing to do with anything. Captain Sorenson is in command, of course, since he *is* a sea captain, if nothing else, but everyone suspects James is half-owner of that awful Glascow monstrosity."

As interested as I was in the relations aboard the *Toucan*, I was more interested in Captain Sorenson's social habits, and my curiosity compelled me to return to that subject.

"Does Captain Sorenson attend the gatherings he is invited to?"

"I'm sure I do not know. All I can say is that he attends *our* gatherings when he is in Iquitos, and I wish he wouldn't. Attractive, of course, and has beautiful manners, but I cannot discover one thing about him, and I've been trying for donkey's years. So annoying!"

I replied as solemnly as I could, "How would it be if you simply did not issue invitations to him?"

"Can't do that. That tiresome husband of mine—a most estimable man," she paused, and thoughtfully qualified this, "in some ways—has the highest regard for the commander and insists that he be invited to our most intimate 'at homes.' All because he was a first-rate captain on the Booth Lines and Michael enjoys him. Imagine inviting anyone for *that* reason!"

Incredible!"

"Just so. But I am glad the matter came up because I am reminded that I wish to invite you, to invite you most especially!—to tea on Thursday next. Or is it Wednesday? No matter. I shall rush home, check the day, and send the information back by special messenger. I'm extremely precise about dates—you'll discover this when you know me better, Julia. Do say you will come!"

"I should like to, but everything depends upon how matters go with Claire."

"Of course. But even if she is much improved, she would not be likely to return as early as next week."

"No. No, I suppose not," I replied a little dully.

"There. Now you are already getting blue-deviled thinking about Mrs. Courtney's illness. Much better to come to tea and not stay here moping about."

"I'm sure you are right. Thank you. I should love to come."

"Then the matter is settled, and I must go."

Angela's departure was prolonged, affectionate, and disorganized. When she was finally ready, I walked with her to her carriage.

As she settled in she said, "You know, Julia, I think that servant, Dalma, is a Bahiana Negress. They are all like that, tall and handsome. Highly intelligent, too. You don't suppose I could hire her away from your sister do you?"

"Outrageous Angela!" I answered, laughing. "Of course, you could not. To begin, I shouldn't allow it. And secondly, she has been with Claire many years and would not leave."

"Then that won't do. In any case, the Brazilian servants are a bother, because so many of them are mixed up in the black *macumba*. Not important, but inconvenient when they suddenly disappear, off to one of their silly voodoo meetings. In Manaus, where we were first stationed, Michael, who is most forthright, was always offending someone and getting a black *macumba* set on us. It came to nothing, of course. Chicken's blood spread over one's verandah, along with a lot of broken glass."

"I am sure Dalma is above this sort of thing," I said uncomfortably.

"One never knows, does one?" Angela responded gaily. "I shall see you on Thursday, or perhaps Wed. . . ."

The carriage rolled away with its occupant still talking.

I went back into the house and upstairs where I found every door along the hallway (all so tightly closed—and possibly locked—before) now standing open. It was a moment before I realized that even unoccupied rooms must be dusted and aired, a moment longer before I recognized the opportunity, so ignominiously abandoned last night, of continuing my exploration of *Los Vientos*. Along with the open doors, was a welcome silence; the hallway was deserted.

I started resolutely down the hallway, and this time I was allowing myself no fanciful notions.

The first door on my left led into an apartment whose floor plan was the mirror image of Laney's and mine. It had a lovely view, less austere furnishings, and an atmosphere of recent occupancy, suggesting it was Claire's and Patrick's suite. When I recognized an escritoire of Claire's, which she had asked me to send out from England to her several years ago, I knew this to be the case.

I turned back into the sitting room, and walked through it, studying everything. If this room held any secrets, it was not surrendering them so easily.

In Patrick's quarters, my attention was briefly caught by rows of books and maps covering two walls. I saw from examining the books that my brother-in-law was a fine custodian of his properties, much preoccupied with all aspects of the rubber industry, its history as well as its technical development. The maps were of the Far East; rubber-producing areas were circled in red ink.

Turning next to Claire's room, I went to the armoire and examined the gowns hanging there. Parisian, I thought. Beautifully, imaginatively cut. Rich fabrics. Subdued colors. Where were the glorious, flaunting colors Claire had loved, had dared with that flaming hair? And had carried off so well.

Feeling as though I viewed the wardrobe of a stranger, I closed the door of the armoire and made my way quickly back through the apartment. Stepping out into the hall I was astonished at the relief I felt.

I started out again, discovering guest bedrooms next and walking through them attentively. Everything was precisely as I expected it to be, and I did not linger.

A single room only remained, the one across from Laney and me, at the end of the hall. Dominique's bedroom, then. When I reached it, I paused on the threshold and looked about me, my reaction one of confusion. The room was so unsuited to its occupant that I could only marvel.

Creamy paper, scattered with tiny sprays of violets covered the walls; the canopied bed was hung with organdie and Swiss eyelet. The rosewood furniture was delicate, small-scaled. A beautiful doll, its china eyes closed, slept in a satiny white box set on a chair. Both doll and box looked untouched.

I could not imagine my little witch-like niece feeling at home here, and I was not long in discovering she did not. Following a trail of smudgy footprints across a snowy rug, I opened a door and soon learned where Dominique really lived, at least during her waking hours in this room.

Long ago, it seemed, she had moved into her closet.

Since it had its own window, it was an airy cubbyhole. Neat uniforms and frocks, hanging on hangers on high rods, swung gently back and forth in the wind. The lower half of the closet housed Dominique's treasures, displayed on battered boxes, set around the floors against the walls.

Seashells, a damaged fan made of brilliant blue feathers, rows of rough colored stones, a whistle fashioned from a piece of sugarcane, the usual keepsakes of a child. Inside the boxes, carefully arranged, were a great many books. They were old and much worn, but gently-used.

Looking down at one that lay open on the drugget rug that covered the floor, I was surprised to discover *Treasure Island.* Dominique could not possibly read such a book, if she could read English at all. Yet she must have been much absorbed in this volume earlier this morning. I could only think she turned the pages, looking at what few pictures there were, recalling a story she knew well.

I stepped farther into the closet and examined the other books. There were such things as *Two Years Before the Mast, The Tea Clipper Run, The Cuttysark.* Patrick Courtney's childhood books? Certainly they had belonged to a boy, to one much older than Dominique.

I remembered Dominique looking through a book last evening in the hammock; it must have been one from her shelves. But how could she be so entertained by a volume of this kind, if she knew nothing of its contents?

From what I had pieced together of Patrick's and Courtney's association with their daughter, I found it difficult to envision either of them poring over books with her. The possibility that Dalma could read English was extremely remote. Yet, I could not give over the notion that someone, at some time, had read such things as *Treasure Island* to Dominique.

I could make nothing of this puzzle. Reaching down to replace the book I had lifted out, I was distracted by a flash of black, seen from the corner of the eye, visible only from the bent position I was in.

I raised up slowly and slid the uniforms along their rod, parting them. Flat against the wall was a child-sized, floor-length robe of sooty black cloth. Beside it, hanging on a string attached to a nail, was a mask of papier-mâché, a singularly unpleasant one.

It was a jackal's head, which appeared to fit completely down over the wearer's head, resting on the shoulders. There were sly, slanting slits to accommodate real eyes. The jackal's lips, done in shiny paint and curled back in a hideous grin, were a bright wet-looking red.

Repelled, I stepped back, studying the mask. I reminded myself that English children in Iquitos must have their own version of such celebrations as Guy Fawkes Day. A thing of this kind could be worn on these occasions.

Then why was the costume hung away on a special nail at the back of the closet where it could not be seen? There was ample room to place it on the rod along with frocks and uniforms.

It was only by accident that I had discovered it. *Why was the costume hidden?*

A puff of wind sent the mask flying out into my face. I struck it away with a gasp and, chilled to the bone, left the room.

I reached the hall as Laney came puffing through the open door at its end. Teresa, buried under the mountain of impedimenta Laney had deemed necessary for the river outing, was scarcely visible behind her.

"Julia, my dear, what a splendid idea the pavilion proved to be. A constant breeze from the river. So refreshing." Laney sent me a sharp look. "I shouldn't wonder if you need a bit of relief from the heat, yourself. You look a little peaked."

As we turned into our sitting room, I said quickly, "An unusually oppressive day."

Even before Teresa finished putting things away, Dalma appeared in the doorway with refreshing drinks, crossed to Laney and me, and set down the tray.

"A wireless, *senhorita,*" she murmured.

A yellow envelope lay beside the glasses; it was all I could do to keep from snatching it. I reached for it as steadily as I could and tore it open, my heart leaping.

Reading it at a glance, I gave a ragged sigh of relief. "Oh, Laney, it's from Patrick—and Claire is established in hospital—and already showing some slight improvement . . ."

Laney's face lighted up.

"Now, you see, Julia. I told you we should come about. Doubtless Claire will be recovered in a few days' time."

Our luncheon arrivd, and for the first time since our coming to *Los Vientos* we ate with appetite. There was cold shrimp nestled in the half shells of "alligator pears;" crisp rolls dripping in butter and cashew preserves; whole oranges, their golden skins carved away, set in beds of mint on Sèvres plates; and finally a coconut sweet.

After we finished, I said, "Patrick asked me to respond to his wire immediately, so that he might be reassured of our safe arrival in *Los Vientos.* I am certain the wireless office must remain open, even during *sesta,* so I am going into Iquitos to reply, and shall ask Basílio to take me.

Basílio and I enjoyed a most amiable ride into town, I speaking English, he, Portuguese, evidently with perfect understanding on both sides. After sending my wireless from a small, steamy office on the pier, I explained to Basílio tha I wished to walk a bit, to acquaint myself with Iquitos.

The plan met with his approval; but I was not to walk here. Saying he knew just the place, he promptly returned me to the carriage and drove on. After a time he drew up along the promenade, with its wide walkway and imposing columns, reined in, and helped me to alight. He would be waiting in this spot, he said.

I began to stroll the promenade, which ran along the waterfront, stopping short of the wharves. Just across the street from me was Iquitos, crowding down to the river, sleeping in the heat. Here in this lower area, the city was laid out in squares, each square outlined by trees.

Most of the houses of the town were scarred with age, but remained beautiful, washed in their rusty-reds, ochres and dim blues. There were two small churches. Feeling the impact of their ancient strength, I decided they might have been built, as I knew many early Peruvian structures were, from stones laboriously transported by the Spanish from the ruins of the Incas.

Cheek-by-jowl with the older buildings were *flavelas*, the homes of the poor. The *flavelas* were like bird's nests, made of bits of things, picked up anywhere. Hammered tins for roofs, walls from discarded scraps of wood and pieces of cardboard, all held together by patches of dried mud and grass. There were no windows; the doorways were raw openings, sometimes hung with a ragged piece of cloth. In front of one hut, a gaunt chicken pecked nervously at bare earth.

I turned away with a sigh. And came face to face with Captain Sorenson. He was standing not ten feet away, leaning against a colonnade.

I could not have been more astonished if Mephistopheles had appeared before me in a cloud of smoke. And to my lasting discredit, my first response was one of delighted surprise mixed with relief at having worn my prettiest frock. This so annoyed me (why should I be pleased to see a man I had vowed to avoid in future?) that I retreated into my most formal manner, saying coldly, "Good afternoon, Commander Sorenson."

"Good afternoon, Julia," he replied, taking me in from head to toe. And then to my confusion, he added, "I was right. You are like a jungle flower."

The storm captain, of course, at his worst—or his best, some traitorous part of me suggested.

"I had not thought to see you still in port, Captain," I said stiffly. "I do hope no mishap has befallen the *Toucan*?"

"No mishap. The *Toucan* has been temporarily diverted to nearby rivers to assist in transporting rubber from estates surrounding Iquitos. James Merriweather is in command at present."

"While you," I replied cooly, "loiter in Iquitos?"

"I am not 'loitering' precisely. I have business here, and people to see." I knew all about the people he had to see. I said nothing. "Julia," he went on, suddening coming to stand before me. "Can't you trust me?"

"Certainly not."

The commander's black brows drew together.

"Why can't you?"

"People who are trustworthy do not go about saying, 'Can't you trust me?'. It never occurs to them to inquire."

"I see," then, apparently much put out, he added, "I think I see."

"Now take Mr. Merriweather," I went on, enjoying myself extremely, "he would never—"

"My dear Julia, could you refrain, please, from comparing me with Jim Merriweather?"

"I shall try. Because," I said frankly, "such comparisons are not quite fair to you, since—"

"Thank you."

I lowered my lids to hide the laughter in my eyes.

"Julia."

I looked up to find another captain, that intense man who had bid me such a strange goodbye aboard the *Toucan*.

"You are deliberately trying to nettle me, and I shan't allow it," he said quietly. "There are important matters to be talked of, and little time. Now, first, sit down on this bench and be comfortable, while you tell me how things go for you at *Los Vientos*."

I sat, murmuring as I settled, "Couldn't you have got that information from Dalma?"

The green eyes flickered. He glanced away, and back again, then answered smoothly, "The Bahiana? Had I seen her, yes. But I had the good fortune to cross paths with you, instead."

No. Not "crossed paths" with me. This meeting was not accidental. He had been notified by someone at *Los Vientos* the instant I set out for Iquitos.

I was beginning to wish this interview at an end, but I had the notion that I should not be allowed to leave until he discovered what he wished to know.

I said briefly, "Laney and I arrived to find my sister was not in residence. She is in Manaus, ill with fever, but improving."

"Just so. When she returns to *Los Vientos* will you remain there long?"

He had no right to ask these questions, but I answered them.

"Only until she is quite recovered, I think. The climate is difficult for Laney."

He took no notice of the reference to Laney.

"Aside from your sister's illness," he went on in that intent way, "there have been no other difficulties? You are managing well enough, among so many strangers?"

"Yes. Well enough."

There was a brief silence. I had the uncomfortable feeling that he was waiting for me to say something more, waiting for me to raise some silent expectation. What did he want of me?

After a time he asked abruptly, "You are acquainted with the pavilion on the Jurepé River, off to the right of *Los Vientos*."

"Yes, but I have not yet been there."

He sat down beside me and took out a pencil and a small notebook, which he turned to a blank page. He sketched a curving line.

"Now listen carefully. The Jurepé flows out of the jungle here," he said, making an X, "comes in above the pavilion," another X, "and goes on past it, heading downstream in a long curve toward the Amazon. The section of the river around the pavilion, as well as the jungle area upstream from it are—safe. These are Courtney properties, the upstream-jungle the source of their rubber. The rubber is brought to a place near the pavilion, then loaded into carts and carried overland to Iquitos. This, in spite of the fact that the Jurepé could transport the rubber all the way to the Amazon markets at far less expense and trouble and in less time."

He paused again, and I looked at me inquiringly.

"The problem is, there is no way to get the rubber through on the river. Approximately four kilometers from the point where Courtney land leaves off, the Jurepé reenters the jungle, and a short distance farther on, it begins to flow through Achual Indian territory. These Indians are headhunters still, highly dangerous, and jealous of their lands.

"An intruder never sees the Achuals, but you can be certain he is watched. He is warned of trespass by two crossed arrows standing upright on the riverbank, the sharp ends buried in the sand. Beyond the arrows, forbidden territory. The unheeding trespasser does not return from here alive."

I was glad for a breeze that passed, cooling my perspiring face.

"And now," he went on, his tone lightening, "enough disagreeable warnings for one day. But you will remember all I have told you? Never go downstream from *Los Vientos*."

I rose to my feet, feeling curiously stifled in spite of the breeze. "I shall remember."

Rising also, he said, "Splendid," then added casually, "I can always be contacted through the Booth Line Offices. That is," he added quickly, "if there is some service I might perform for you. Jim Merriweather, as well. And if both of us should turn up absent, Michael and Angela Carlson."

"I have met Angela. She came to call."

"Did she?"

He sounded so pleased that I looked at him, much surprised.

"Someone you can always count on, if you need . . ." Once again he paused and started over. "She is quite marvelous, don't you think? When you met her," he asked, smiling, "was she wearing a bird on her head?"

"Yes," I answered, smiling back, relieved at this change of conversation. "And it stayed there."

"Naturally," he replied solemnly. "The English colony of Iquitos has been keeping track for many years, and to date not one of Angela's hats has gone to join its fellows in the jungle."

We laughed, laughter of a kind we had never shared before. For me it was also soothing laughter, relegating ominous warnings to the background, without for an instant diminishing their importance. This, I realized, was the way the captain wanted it.

When the laughter left his face, he turned silent and stood without moving, staring down at me.

"I must go," I said abruptly. "I am overdue at *Los Vientos*."

Still silent, he turned and walked beside me to the carriage. Basílio was sound asleep, sitting bolt upright on his box, snoring loudly.

The commander handed me into the carriage, but remained in the doorway making no move to depart. He appeared to be taking some matter under consideration, and I found the lengthening silence awkward.

"If you would be so good as to instruct Basílio to proceed—"

To my amazment, he stepped into the carriage and closed the door. Too late I realized his intent. There was no time to think—

Strong fingers caught my chin and pulled my face to his. The next instant hard lips came down, searing, demanding—and my own lips responded fierily.

I had been kissed once before, by Martin Millsborough, whose father's land marches next to ours in Surrey; but Martin's kiss had done nothing to prepare me for this lovely blazing moment, which I made no attempt to end.

The captain was the first to pull away and I thought dizzily that I should say something. But I found I could not speak at all. The commander seemed to be having some difficulty speaking, too.

And then, on a shaky laugh, "Not done, of course. Jumping into a lady's carriage and kissing her against her will."

"It wasn't against my will," I said, finding my voice at last.

"Julia, you remarkable creature!" And he laughed again, still in that odd way. Then he kissed me once more, gently, at the corner of my mouth, leapt down from the carriage, and calling "*Vai embora!*" to Basílio, was gone.

The carriage gave a great lurch, and rolled off down the street.

After my meeting with the captain, I allowed myself a dangerous daydream: the commander coming to call at *Los Vientos* (I could almost hear our laughter from the morning room); or perhaps asking to join him on the promenade at sunset where, I had learned, most of Iquitos came in the cool of the evening for the *paseo*.

But when, after two days, a message arrived from him, it made no mention of calls and *paseos*.

Julia,

We must meet again—tomorrow? Please come at sesta. *The meeting must be quite private (once again I am asking you to trust me). Basílio knows the direction; it is a small house on the river outside of Iquitos. I shall be waiting for your answer. Eagerly. Anxiously.*

Eric

My first stunned reaction was an odd one—that I had never known the captain's Christian name until now.

Dalma, who had brought the message stood patiently by. After a time she asked, "Should I remain, *senhorita?* Or do you wish me to return later for your reply?"

"Do not wait," I said without lifting my eyes from the square of paper. "There will be no answer."

During the following week, there were frequent, cautious communications from Patrick; Claire was improving slowly. Laney and I settled in at *Los Vientos,* rather uneasily, to wait. We spent as much time as possible at the pavilion.

This proved the pleasantest of places. It was furnished in roughly-hewn wooden couches and chairs piled high with cushions. Cool breezes blew steadily across us and went singing up down the river through the reeds.

Teresa gradually became our permanent handmaiden, accompanying us on our pavilion junkets and making us exceedingly comfortable. She and Laney appeared to have a perfect understanding, although Laney had not learned a word of Portuguese, and Teresa rarely spoke in any language.

We always knew when the rubber shipments were arriving because they were preceded by a signal, a great hollow booming through the jungle. The sound, which traveled for miles, came from beating a piece of wood on the sapopema tree. The sapopema, about eighteen feet at its base, fanned out in vertical bars protruding from its trunk. When one of these bars was struck it produced this dramatic signal.

I never tired of watching the unloading of the rubber from the canoes and rafts but my interest was clouded by the sight of the *serinqueiros*, the rubber gatherers. Their condition was the sorriest to be imagined. They were so gaunt and stunted it was difficult to uess whether they were men or boys. They staggered dully back and forth under their great loads, their emaciated torsos glistening with sweat, their legs like sticks and more often than not covered in running sores.

"Shameful," Laney said, aghast. "When I finally meet up with Patrick Courtney I shall give him a piece of my mind."

I thought I might do the same.

Early in the week I received a note from Angela, with the triumphant message, "It was Thursday, after all! For tea, you know—five o'clock."

The Carlsons lived in one of the iron houses I had seen from the promenade. I was surprised at their choice; I did not care much for these houses, but this one, bright-white, set in a square, flaming garden, had a measured loveliness about it.

Angela, herself, answered the door and greeted me with great enthusiasm and a hearty kiss on the cheek. She wore another crêpe dress, this one of a rather alarming shade of acid green.

"Come in, my dear. Isn't this a dreadful house?" she asked cheerfully. "Built by the Booth Lines, so what can one expect? Has one redeeming feature. It's haunted, you know."

"Is it?" I said, laughing. "You must tell me—"

"Of course I shall, but come and meet a few of my friends . . ."

The salon was so full of people that I could hardly move about. Angela's "tea party" was not like any tea party I had ever attended. There were as many men as there were women. The men, however, did not drink tea but sherry. Everyone seemed to be enjoying himself immensely.

I was passed wildly from one group to another and was relieved to fetch up finally, in a quiet oasis, beside Michael Carlson.

He appeared unexceptional at first glance. He was a short, sandy-haired man, with a clipped gray mustache. But I soon discovered that he had the most engaging manner. He greeted me warmly, made agreeable inquiries about my voyage out, inquired what I thought of Iquitos, all the while studying me out of humorous, piercing blue eyes.

While we were chatting together, Angela came to take me away to have tea. As we passed a door leading into the garden, I glimpsed Captain Sorenson, standing in the shade of a cinnamon tree talking to a group of people. He looked up just as I reached the doorway; and for an instant I felt the blue-green flash of his gaze before I moved on.

While I had tea and visited animatedly with the stream of people Angela presented, my eyes wandered time and again to the open door.

Since everyone present must now I had recently been a passenger on the *Toucan*, I thought it likely the captain would seek me out and pay his respect. Custom almost demanded it. A few polite words. Nothing more.

But the time passed and he did not come. Guests began to depart; I prepared to leave also. And if, as I took an affectionate leave of the Carlsons, I felt a painful constriction in my heart, no one ever knew.

When I reached home and found Laney absent from the sitting room, I decided she must be taking her tea at the pavilion. Lonely and restless, I decided to join her there, and started to my bedroom to remove my hat. On my threshold, I found a bouquet of flowers.

I studied the bouquet from a few feet away. Warily. Then I went over and picked up the flowers, more warily still.

All was in order. There were three enormous white magnolias, glowing against dark green leaves, their stems stuck down into a kitchen jar filled with water. In the curve of a leaf was a scrap of paper.

"From A Fren," the message read.

Dominique's apology. I accepted it with a smile and a rush of pleasure and carried it into the bedroom, where I set it down on the washstand. I took off my hat and recombed my hair which felt uncomfortably damp and heavy. Afterward I went to the bedside table and picked up *Wind in the Willows*. Passing back through the sitting room, I crossed the hall and knocked on the door opposite mine.

Apparently I was expected. "Come in, lady," a voice said.

I found Dominique lying on the floor of her closet, turning the pages of a book.

"Thank you for the bouquet," I said, "and I think perhaps you should call me Julia."

"Very well," she replied, in that curiously adult language she always used. Her eyes went to *The Wind in the Willows* and stayed there.

I came to the unfortunate conclusion that my niece's apology was made in a shrewd attempt to get at a book she longed to see, rather than out of any genuine regret. Not much of a start, but a start, nonetheless.

"Can you read English, Dominique?"

"No."

"Shall I read this book aloud to you? It belongs to your mother. She and I read it together as—"

"Yes. Read."

"You are meant to say, 'If you please.'"

"I shall add that 'if you please' next time," she replied politely.

I began to read. Domnique, as if my voice were a magnet drawing her, came out of the closet and lay at my feet on the rug, listening with the deepest attention.

Watching her as she listened, I caught glimpses of another child. She smiled, revealing two recently acquired front teeth, endearingly overlapped. On one occasion, she laughed; but she was careful with laughter, I noticed.

When I thought I had read sufficiently I closed the book. She sighed but made no protest.

"You will read the rest sometime?"

"Oh, yes. We shall meet each afternoon until the book is done."

I looked about the room, a little a loss with this odd, golden-eyed child. My gaze settled at last on the elaborately dressed English doll.

"Who gave you the beautiful doll?" I asked curiously.

"Claire."

"Do you always call your mother 'Claire,' never mother?"

"She does not wish to be called 'mother.'"

Knowing Claire, I felt little surprise at this. But I was interested to see that Dominique had no regrets over the arrangement, apparently.

"Do you play with this doll?"

"No. She can't get out out her box."

"Why not?"

"Because I won't let her out," she answered with a kind of vicious relish.

I shuddered. Instead of loving the doll her mother had given her, Dominique had imprisoned it.

"I like this sort of doll," she went on, pulling a small black doll with carmine lips and monkey-fur hair from her pocket.

I had to look away. "Is this a new doll?" I asked as evenly as I could.

"Yes. A friend gave it to me."

"Dalma?"

"No, another one."

"What is she like, this other friend?"

"Not a 'she.' My best friend is a man."

I felt my temples begin to pound. "What does your friend look like?"

"He's tall as a tree. Sometimes he dresses all in white. And he shines."

"Where do you meet him?" I asked in a muffled voice.

"In a secret place," Dominique replied, and her face closed against me.

During the next three days we heard nothing more from Patrick, and my anxieties concerning Claire began to sharpen again. As long as Laney and I were receiving daily reports from Manaus, encouraging us to believe Claire might be starting home at any time, waiting was bearable.

Now, faced with this new silence, I grew highly restive. The old, alarming questions were back again. If Claire were improving, as Patrick had maintained, why had we not had some word direct from her? I did not know the name of the hospital where she was established. Patrick had never referred to her physician by name. Had he deliberately omitted this information so that it would be impossible for me to inquire regarding this doctor's credentials?

How could I go about doing so, in any case? Whom should I ask?

Eric Sorenson had suggested I come to him with any problem, and I might have done so immediately after our meeting on the wharf. Now the thought of turning to him for any reason made my face go hot.

I could not approach people I had just met, even such people as the Carlsons, with these curious inquiries. Not without inviting them to wonder why I was poorly informed on all matters pertaining to my sister's illness. They might even wonder at my concern. Mrs. Courtney's husband was with her in Manaus, seeing to her welfare, was he not?

I needed a friend, someone who would accept the fact that I knew so little of Claire's situation without surprise, then consider and advise me. The only person I felt who would be sympathetic was James Merriweather. But I had no idea of how to find him.

When, late one afternoon, I looked up and saw him approaching the pavilion, I thought I had never been go glad to receive a visitor. I dropped my unread book and rushed to meet him, extending both hands in greeting.

"Good afternoon, James," I said happily, quite unaware until lately that he was no longer "Mr. Merriweather" to me. "I have been thinking of you lately, and longing for one of our visits. How delighted I am to see you!"

"And I, you, Julia," he answered quietly, his gray eyes studying my face rather searchingly, I thought. "How have things been going?"

"We shall take a walk after you have spoken with Laney, and I shall tell you."

James received another enthusiastic welcome from Laney. After they had visited, I suggested that he and I stroll along the river's edge.

We had gone only a short distance when he said, "Well?"

"You have heard that my sister was not at *Los Vientos* when we arrived?"

"Yes."

I paused, choosing my words carefully. "She had a fever which took a bad turn, making it necessary for her and Patrick to depart most precipitously, to get her to hospital in Manaus. There is no hospital in Iquitos?"

"None worthy of the name."

"So I thought. Patrick has been, until the last few days, most conscientious in keeping us informed of Claire's progress but, of course, his messages, coming by wireless, are confined to reports on the state of Claire's health, and are not otherwise informative. I find myself troubled by lack of details and would feel reassured knowing the name of the hospital Patrick had chosen for Claire, and also that of the physician attending my sister."

"Then you will soon be comfortable on both counts. I can discover these things for you easily. I shall send wires to Manaus and set friends to making inquiries as soon as I return to the pier."

"I knew you would do so," I answered, much pleased.

"Of course you knew I should. But I think Courtney might have kept you better advised."

"Perhaps," I replied, turning cautious again, "it did not occur to him I should fuss over such details."

"Most natural for you to do so, I should think. And here is immediate information for you. I may well be able to guess Mrs. Courtney's physician at this moment. There is a Dr. Geoffrey Andrews who is a specialist in tropical fevers. He has made a study of them for years and has written several books on the subject. He would be the natural choice."

"How comforting if he should prove to be the one!" I said impulsively. "Surely with such a man she would be saf—would receive the finest treatment. In any case," I added hastily, "the most recent reports from Patrick have been encouraging."

"Then that part is all right, isn't it? And I may well have replies to all your questions by tomorrow afternoon, when, I hope," he stopped smiling a little shyly, then repeated, "when I hpoe you will allow me to fetch you for the *paseo* on the Malecón Promenade. Will you come?"

"Indeed, I shall," I replied enthusiastically.

"Many Europeans stroll on the promenade in the early evenings, visiting their friends there. I shall be able to present you to any number of people."

"I must tell you that I have been presented to any number of people already," I replied, laughing. "But I shall enjoy furthering these acquaintances."

"Angela?"

His voice carried that note of affectionate amusement that seemed always to accompany any mention of Angela Carlson.

"Yes. We became friends the instant we met."

"I thought you might," he smiled. "And all is settled, then, for tomorrow?"

"Quite settled." And with a sigh, I added, "And I shall be so glad to have news from Manaus."

We walked some distance in silence.

"I think there must be something more troubling you, however," he said.

There was of course. I hardly knew how to begin.

Finally I asked, "Are you, by chance, acquainted with my niece?"

To my surprise, he seemed overlong in answering.

"Yes. That is," he amended, "I know the Courtneys have a daughter."

"And the servant, Dalma? Are you acquainted with her."

"Well—in a way—yes."

"Dominique is in Dalma's charge and has been since she was a baby. Dalma's influence over my niece is, I expect, very strong."

"Do you object to that? I should think Dalma would be generally considered a most exceptional *babá*, and Dominique thought to be in good hands."

"Except for one thing . . . You told me once about the black *macumba*."

I could see James was taken aback at this but he said, "I remember."

"Do you think Dalma could be a member of this cult?"

"I have no way of knowing. The followers of the *macumba* keep their secrets well. But even if Dalma is involved . . . ? Oh, I see. Dominique."

"Yes."

James stopped and looked at me. "Whatever put this in your mind? Why connect Dalma and her charge with the *macumba*?"

"There are a ghastly sort of black robe and a mask, made to fit a child, in Dominique's closet. And she plays with dolls which look like voodoo trappings rather than dolls . . ."

James smiled suddenly, and I was surprised to hear relief in his voice as he answered, "Is that all? Many English children in Brazil and Peru play with native dolls. What could be more natural? As for the costume, she may well have been in Manaus at one time and wore it to *carnaval*. Everyone in Brazilian towns attend *carnaval*. Dogs, children, and adults."

"There is more. Dominique has a 'friend' whom she meets secretly. A man. He is some sort of priest, I think. A bizarre and unnerving one. She says he is dressed all in white, and he *shines*."

I thought I saw a nerve jump at the corner of James's mouth; but in the saffron light of the dying day, I could not be certain.

"She said nothing else?"

"No. I think she has been warned to silence."

James looked away from me, studying the river with narrowed eyes. When he turned back, both his face and manner were composed.

"Is your niece an imaginative child?"

"Yes. I should say so."

"Has it ever occurred to you that she is telling you something totally untrue? Children are forever dealing in such fanciful stories. She may even have made this one up to shock you."

"It is possible, of course, but the story has a ring of truth about it."

"Greater credit to Dominique," he said easily. "I am certain this was what she was striving for, the ring of truth."

"Perhaps," I answered unhappily.

Just before we reached the pavilion, my companion said suddenly. "Matters are not as you imagine them, Julia. You must not worry further about Dominique. There is absolutely no need."

"Very well. I shall try not to."

And it was only later it occurred to me that this was a curious speech. How could James be so certain, so vehement, about Dominique's affairs when he barely knew her?

The next afternoon at dusk, wearing a frock of a fashionable new color called "ashes-of-roses," I strolled the Malecón with James, feeling lighthearted and more peaceful than I had in many days.

Although nothing further had been heard from Patrick, James brought comforting news of Claire. She was indeed under the care of Dr. Geofrey Andrews and was established in a small, exclusive hospital, which James knew. He was acquainted with Dr. Andrews, though only slightly, but had visited with him on occasion over the years.

"No question of his competence." Then, making a wry face, he added, "Or of his interest in his subject. Talks of nothing but tropical fevers, and is a dead bore. Obviously qualified to treat Mrs. Courtney's malady, however."

Such reassurances had mitigated my worries, at least temporarily. I was prepared to enjoy my evening.

We had gone only a short distance when we saw Angela and Michael approaching from the opposite direction. Angela was wearing one of her famous hats. This one, a great cartwheel with a curiously misshapen crown, was entirely covered with fluffy white feathers.

"My God! I beg your pardon, Julia, but what has Angela got on her head this time?"

"A swan," I said, delighted.

"You're a genius," he answered, laughing.

As the Carlsons drew near, Angela called, "There you are, my dears. I want a word with you, James."

"Now, what have I done?" James questioned in a low voice.

When the four of us met, Michael greeted us cordially. Angela, glancing absently at me, saying, "You look ravishing, Julia," was inclined to get on with her grievances. "As for you, James," she continued, closing her fan and poking him in the chest, "I wish to know where you have been, you tiresome man."

"Up the Napo River. On a rubber run. I see you have a new hat, Angela."

"You won't get around me with flattery, James," Angela replied severely. "I disapprove of your flighty ways, and I shall tell your mother so when next we meet.'

"My flighty ways?" James repeated, looking bewildered.

"Going off like that. Neglecting to respond to my invitation. Very bad form."

"What invitation?" James asked helplessly. "I have had no invitations from you in quite some time."

"Is that so?" Angela repied, looking much struck by this information. "How very odd!" Suddenly, she smiled. "In that case, I shall forgive you. You couldn't very well attend something you were not invited to, could you? I must have forgot all about you, dear boy. A pity! It was a lovely occasion, wasn't it Julia?"

"Indeed it was," I said cordially, suppressing a smile.

At that moment we were joined by another group of people, and Michael, who had been watching the exchange between James and Angela with the liveliest appreciation, turned to greet them.

The women in their lovely Paris gowns looked like butterflies blown in on the breeze. In the midst of so much color and richness, the men, in white linen suits and cream silk shirts, were almost a relief to the eye.

James knew everyone. I, myself, was moderately well acquainted, having met a number of these people at Angela's tea party. After we visited for some time, I was glad to find my companion skillfully maneuvering me away, then across the promenade to the edge of the walkway. We stood there and rested a while looking out over the Amazon.

We began to stroll again, continuing along the edge of the promenade. We had come almost to the end of the pier, when I looked up and saw the *Toucan*. Eric Sorenson was on board, standing by the railing. I saw no crew, and in the dusk, he looked a lonely man. This was nonsense, of course. He had but to come ashore to meet with friends. Even so, the sight of the *Toucan*, with the solitary figure on deck, sent a curious pang through me.

"Is the *Toucan* remaining long in Iquitos?" I asked casually.

"Eric—Captain Sorenson, takes her out day after tomorrow. We are alternating runs."

When James suggested that it was time to turn back, I was glad enough to resume our walk in the opposite direction. The crowds on the promenade were dispersing, lights beginning to bloom across Iquitos, and along the promenade, one entire building across from us lighting up all at once.

"The Malecón Palace Hotel," James said. "One of the most luxurious and beautiful hotels along the river."

The front of the imposing white stucco building was cut by rows of windows outlined in brilliantly-colored tiles; shallow marble steps led up to a wide, glowing doorway faced with these same tiles.

"Business meetings in the lobby," James said. "Even on Sundays . . ."

But I hardly heard. A man, starting up the steps, stopped abruptly, turned full around, and stared at me. Even though he was some distance away,I recognized him. He was the Portuguese who had passed Captain Sorenson and me the day I went ashore at Ilha de Careiro.

A guarded friendship had sprung between my niece and me. More and more often, when we were alone, I saw that other, elusive child whose smile turned the plain face attractive, whose laughter never failed to surprise and beguile me.

I had no notion whether Dominique was beginning to be fond of me or whether she simply tolerated me because I could read English. Whatever her reasons, her behavior was exemplary during our visits together, and I came to enjoy many things about her, particularly her quaint, lively mind.

One day, after we had finished reading, she asked to hold the book. As she lay on the floor at my feet, studing the pictures, I surveyed her critically. I thought her appearance might be improved.

Her hair was quite beautiful, heavy and fine, but it was pulled back from her too-high forehead in stiff braids, from which it constantly escaped in untidy wisps.

"Dominique," I suggested, "would you like me to cut your hair?"

"For what reason?" she asked cautiously.

"I think you would look pretty with a straight fringe across your forehead, and your hair square about your face, like that of a medieval page boy."

"Me? Pretty?" Then getting to her feet, she said, "Let's cut it, Julia."

I settled her in a full-sized chair before a long mirror, put a cloth about her shoulders and fetched my scissors. Her legs dangling, she sat without moving a muscle, while I combed and cut. I took my time and worked with care. When I finished, I looked at her, much pleased.

"You see?" I said.

She studied herself for some time. Then she threw back her head and gave a squeaky, delighted laugh. She sounded like a happy mouse.

Her short, free hair now swung about her face as she climbed down from her chair, and I complimented myself on a good afternoon's work. But my pleasure was short-lived.

Taking another look at herself in the mirror, she said with satisfaction, "I think my fren will like the way my head looks."

"The one you meet in the secret place?" I asked in a stifled voice.

"That's the one," she answered happily.

Now, several days later, rapping on Dominique's door and receiving no answer, I remembered this conversation. I knocked again, urgently. Still no answer. I opened the door and found what I had dreaded to find for a long time, my niece's room empty at *sesta*.

She could, of course, be in Dalma's quarters. But I was already allowing for the frightening possibility that Dalma was also missing.

Dominique had expected me, and she loved above all things to be read to. I could think of only one thing that might take precedence over my visit. A visit to her "fren."

I swung around and, half running, retraced my steps to my bedroom. I pressed imperiously on the summons bell, and stood for a moment breathing hard. A light knock came almost immediately.

"Passe."

The door opened. It was Teresa. Keeping my voice low, so that I would not disturb Laney, I said, "It is Dalma I wished to speak to. Send her to me, please."

◆

Love that is hoarded moulds at last
Until we know some day
The only thing we ever have
Is what we give away.

Louis Ginsberg
Song

◆

Teresa's gaze fixed itself on a spot over my left shoulder. "Dalma has gone to attend her aging grandmother, who fell sick in the night."

My throat tightened.

"And Dominique? Why is she not in her room as usual at this time of day?"

Teresa ran her tongue over her lips. "She is visiting a schoolmate, *senhorita.*"

"At *sesta*?" I asked in an incredulous voice.

"Sim, senhorita."

"When is she meant to return?"

Teresa's gaze shifted to her hands, which she studied with interest. "Dalma, who arranges such matters, neglected to inform me of the hour."

I gave it up. I could question Teresa forever and learn nothing more. Nor, I knew, would I fare any better with the other servants.

So Dalma and Dominique had slipped away together, summoned by Dominique's "fren," to the "secret place."

Deeply agitated, I tried to comfort myself by remembering how James had reassured me when I told him of my fears for Dominique. But wasn't it a strange sort of reassurance, after all? He had not denied the possibility of Dominique's meeting someone; he had simply said I was not to worry.

But I could not stop worrying. After all, Dominique, my niece, was being raised by a Brazilian servant, being denied her English birthright. Without even knowing she had one. And who cared enough to intercede?

I cared. But I had no authority, no say whatever in her upbringing. Unless—I should be allowed to take her home to England. In rising excitement, I considered this possibility, feeling certain that Patrick and Claire would agree readily enough, possiblity with enthusiasm. The more I thought about the idea, the more attractive it became.

I went to my room early that night and once there I tried to settle down with a book; but I couldn't concentrate. After a time I gave up and laid the book aside, remembering restlessly that another day had passed without news from Manaus. James's reassurances about Claire's situation were becoming less comforting in the face of Patrick's lengthening silence.

How much longer could I wait here? Now that I had decided to take Dominique away with me, I felt it was urgent to do so immediately. I did not relish more troubled afternoons such as this one, waiting anxiously for my niece to return. From where?

During *sesta* I had gone several times to her room, only to find it empty still. With each visit, my alarm and disappointment had grown. It was not until teatime that I heard Dalma's voice in the courtyard; then Dominique's mouselike laughter, filled with happiness, had drifted up to me. The sound of that laughter had let me know the depth of her joy in her meetings with her friend.

What hold did this man have over Dominique?

Whatever it was, I decided now that until I could get her out of his reach, I would make moves of my own. To begin, I would keep a careful watch over her, making it difficult for Dalma to whisk her away so easily. Secondly, I would use some "spells" and "charms" of my own.

Getting to my feet, I searched out a pen and, writing "To A Fren" on a scrap of paper, placed the paper with an edge showing inside the cover of *Wind in the Willows.*

Then, carrying the book, I went silently through the sitting room and across the hall. When I opened Dominique's door, a shaft of light fell into her room. Following the light's path, I crossed to the bed and looked down at her.

She slept peacefully, her long, sweeping lashes throwing fans of shadows across her cheeks. The corners of her mouth were creased, as though she smiled to herself in her dreams. She lay on her back, with an arm flung out. I placed the book on her pillow and leaned down and kissed one of the shadowed cheeks. She stirred in her sleep. The creases at the corners of her mouth seemed to deepen.

I returned to my room and closed the door behind me, feeling less disturbed since visiting Dominique, more than ready for sleep now. It was nearly midnight.

I heard a light knock, and turned, startled. Dalmas stood on my threshold.

"Good evening, *senhorita*," she said in a low voice, obviously intent on not disturbing Laney.

"Good evening," I replied, wondering what could possibly be bringing her to my door at this hour. Meanwhile, I could not resist a thrust. "And how is your ill grandmother?" I inquired, looking straight at her.

"Much improved, thank you," came the bland answer. She paused, then added smoothly, "You have a caller, *senhorita*."

I was astounded. "A caller? Impossible. Do you know what time it is?"

"Yes, *senhorita*. Nevertheless, Captain Sorenson of the *Toucan* wishes to speak with you in the morning room."

So the commander of the *Toucan* had come to call on me at *Los Vientos* at last. And as was to be expected, in the middle of the night. Furious, humiliated, I turned my back on Dalma and studied the objects on my dressing table.

When I thought I could hold my voice quite even, I said, "Kindly take this message to Captain Sorenson, if you please: 'Miss Scott is not accessible to visitors at such an hour. She retires early.'"

"Very well, *senhorita*," Dalma answered doubtfully, "but I think I must tell you, then, there is more to the captain's message. He also asked me to say that if you did not come down to the morning room to meet him, he would come and fetch you there himself. He allows you ten minutes."

I raised my head with a jerk, and met my own stormy eyes in the dressing table mirror. How dare he send me such a message! And by word of mouth, through a servant.

The comb I was turning in my hand grew still, and my fingers tightened on it. It occurred to me that this servant, far from being disconcerted by being asked to deliver an intimate message, had the disinterested air of one long accustomed to passing on such messages. Moreover, she did not appear to think a midnight call from the captain in the least peculiar.

"Tell me, Dalma," I said pleasantly. "Who let the commander in?"

"I did, *senhorita*."

"But surely it was somewhat coincidental that you should be passing the front door so late, just at the moment our visitor arrived."

A pause. Then, carefully, "Captain Sorenson sent word, in advance, of the time he expected to be here."

"By Basilio?"

"And—others."

So, through a network of servants, Eric Sorenson was in the habit of sending messages to *Los Vientos*. Such a network could scarcely be established on a minute's notice and be trustworthy; obviously, it had been in use for a very long time.

◆

If the heart of a man is depress'd with cares,
The mist is dispell'd when a woman appears.

John Gay
The Beggar's Opera

◆

Eric, determined—for whatever reason—to force a meeting between us, had simply employed an old and secret method to reach me, one, without question, formerly used to reach someone else. My fingers tightened on the comb until the prongs cut into my flesh.

Eric and Claire.

How could I not have known? The signposts had been there, set out for me to see. Eric's careful denial of any connection with *Los Vientos*; James's unusual confusion at mentioning the captain's "friend in Iquitos;" Eric's meeting with Dalma the day of our arrival, taking precedence over everything.

A stab of pain beneath my heart ,hot, searing—surprising. Although Eric and Claire must have met for years before my coming, I felt strangely betrayed by both of them. Moreover, my entire body burned with humiliation when I though of my response to Eric's kiss in the carriage. Would I never learn, where this man was concerned?

Yes. Now. I had just received the ultimate lesson. I stood waiting for the pain to subside and when it did, I did not fear its return.

I felt as though I had suddenly been removed to a distant, icy plain where I was quite safe from such unexpected responses. What a wintry place it was! But this suited me. Such places are not easily accessible to others; and a frosty wind from my retreat might, I thought, prove beneficial to the arrogant captain of the *Toucan*.

"I have reconsidered," I said to Dalma. "I shall meet the commander, after all."

I could see her in the mirror, uncertain now, confused by my manner.

I dimissed her coldly. "That will be all. Thank you."

She left at last, and I, who had lately drifted into the habit of letting my hair fall more loosely about my face when I dressed it, took it down and brushed it severely back. Then I went to meet Captain Sorenson; and I did not hurry.

When I entered the morning room, I found Eric standing in the open doorway that led onto the terrace. He was not in uniform, but wore native sandals, white trousers, and a silk shirt open at the neck. In the light from the sconces, his skin had gone dark bronze. His eyes glittered. He looked like a pirate in from a raid.

"Good evening, Julia."

I returned no greeting. "Why did you come here tonight? What do you want of me?"

I felt as though my eyes glittered, too, and I stared back at him unblinkingly.

"You refused to meet me. I had to see you. I must know how you are at all times, know from you directly, to be certain that all is well with you."

"I have not sought your protection," I replied icily.

"Nevertheless, I know how to guard my own."

"I have no idea what you are talking about," I said, still looking at him in that unblinking way. "Why did you not tell me you knew Claire? You do know her, do you not?" I asked tauntingly.

It was some time before he spoke, and when he did it was with a violence that startled me. "Of course I know her. Far too well."

He stopped abruptly, appearing to collect himself with an effort. "But matters are not as they seem to you. If Claire and I meet on the street, we do not so much as exchange greetings."

I went on as though he had not spoken. "I think you and Claire have not always passed as strangers, however. You know this house too well—how easily you trespass here . . ."

A red streak appeared down one copper cheek. "Yes, I know this house well, but none of this has anything to do with you and me. Certainly, Claire does not—" Again the harshness at the mention of her name, the violence, betraying, betraying—

It was then I understood. One of Claire's discards, I thought. And he had not forgiven her. He never would. I knew how Claire dealt. She stole men's souls away.

"Do not seek me out again," I said.

I turned and started toward the door, but Eric was beside me before I had gone two steps. Hard fingers caught one of my wrists, encircling it, tightening against my skin like a hot metal band.

I felt color flooding into my face, and I made a futile effort to jerk my hand away. The band tightened again, burned deeper.

"Kindly release me."

"I shall release you when I have said what I have to say."

"Then say it, and have done."

"Listen well, Julia. I have waited for you a long time. If you think I shall let you slip away so easily, you underestimate me."

I could scarcely believe what I heard. Even now, no word of love, only of possession. He offered nothing and asked everything, yet seemed determined not to let me go. I despised him for his arrogance; and I longed to lash back at him as cruelly as I could.

"You may command others. You may not command me. In this I resemble my sister Claire." I stopped, then continued, "Is this the way you lost her? Did you demand too much, command once too often? Or did she simply tire of you, as she had of so many before you?"

The red streak in his cheek turned a harsh, dark red. He dropped my wrist.

I swung around and walked away.

The next afternoon, wary and alert, I went to Dominique's room immediately after the noonday meal, arriving there a full three-quarters of an hour earlier than was my custom, well before *sesta*. I knocked confidently. When no answer came, I thre the door open with a crash. The room was empty.

It as almost as though Dalma and Dominique, somehow divining my intentions of keeping a more careful watch on them, had deliberately outmaneuvered me. But I knew they could not be long gone. I had heard Dominique's voice in the upper hallway only minutes before.

Angry and dismayed, I ran out of the room, through the open door at the en dof the hall and down the steps to the courtyard. There were still a number of people about. Dalma and Dominique were not among them.

Crossing the courtyard I stepped quickly into the avenue of trees. At its farthest end I saw the culprits disappearing toward the river. Dominique, holding to Dalma's hand, was walking as fast as her short legs could carry her.

Stepping back among the trees along one side of the avenue, I followed, keeping them in view. I had no plan. I doubted I should be able to trail them to their final destination, but even if I could, following them into the jungle alone, where I should doubtless become lost in seconds, would accomplish nothing.

But, still angry, I was determined to follow them to the jungle's edge and to discover the point where they entered. James had laughed away my suspicions about Dominique. After today I should be able to present substantial proof that these suspicions could not be so lightly dismissed.

Dalma and Dominique turned upstream, and I accelerated my pace. I came out of the avenue as they entered a grove of willow trees some distance down the river. I could see the jungle, still a long way off, and I wondered why they had cut through the grove when they could have gone down the beach much further.

After they disappeared among the trees, I lifted my skirts and ran, afraid I might lose them. Reaching the edge of the willows, I stopped and peered through a curtain of waving fronds. In the center of the grove was a clearing, and I discovered, to my astonishment, that this quiet, pleasant place seemed to mark the end of their journey.

Dalma had settled herself comfortably on a rock in the sun. Dominique stood nearby, watching the opposite side of the clearing. They were waiting for someone.

They seemed to have no idea they were followed. Even so, I took care on my way through the lush greenness of the grove, hiding behind the trunks of the willows, shifting between them as quietly as I could. Arriving at the clearing, I established myself behind a tangle of thick vines. From here I could see reasonably well. I, too, waited, my breathing erratic, my nerves tingling.

After a time, Dalma glanced up, and I knew that whoever was expected had arrived.

"Boa tarde, Capitão," she said pleasantly.

"Boa tarde, Dalma."

My heart jolted. How well I knew that voice! I remained motionless, watching. The next instant I heard Dominique give a sweaky shout and saw her hurl herself into the clearing.

Eric Sorenson stepped into view, scooped her up and threw her into the air. "Hello, Domino," he said, laughing as he caught her. "So you came to see me again today."

"I came, Eric."

As he set her on the ground, I saw my niece transformed. Her golden eyes brimmed with excitement. Her face, beaded with perspiration, looked like a damp apple blossom. Even her freckles seemed to have disappeared.

"Can you stay long enough to make me a sugarcane whistle?" she asked anxiously.

"If we are quick about it. There is little time, because I must take the *Toucan* upriver this afternoon."

"Someday, when I am grown up, I shall go aboard the *Toucan* with you," she said, again in that anxious voice that made her statement a question.

"Of course you will. But now you must hold out your hand. I have a present for you."

He reached into his pocket, pulled out a tiny string of colored beads and dropped them into her cupped hand. Dominique, holding them as though they were precious jewels, looked down at them enthralled, while Eric looked at her.

He wore his uniform and he seemed uncommonly tall, standing above the fragile child. The gold braid on his jacket and cap glinted in the sun.

"He's tall as a tree, dressed all in white, and he *shines*," Dominique had said, describing her "fren."

Tears glazed my eyes. The scene before me swam, then steadied. I saw it with a painful clarity now.

There was Dalma, an integral part of the tableau, sitting placidly on her rock, as she must have sat through countless such meetings through the years. She was making lace, and occasionally she paused to glance fondly at Dominique, so blissful in Eric's company.

The man and child had drifted down the clearing, and I could no longer hear what they said. Eric was whittling skillfully at a piece of sugarcane he had cut, listening gravely to Dominique, chattering animatedly. How happy they looked in each other's company, *how completely they seemed to belong together.*

Watching with dawning certainty, I felt those tiresome, persistent tears begin again, but I made no attempt to check them. Eric had, after all told the truth last night. The messages he sent to *Los Vientos* were not for Claire—not any more. They were for Dalma, who had been Dominique's nurse since she was born. Messages making arrangements for the meetings in the willow grove, of course. There would be other messages, too, I thought, giving instructions and advice, important ones because they dealt with matters concerning the welfare of his daughter, Dominique.

Suddenly, I could not bear to look toward the clearing any longer. I turned and ran back through the trees, stumbling, pausing, coming out of the grove at last.

I took out my handkerchief and attempted to tidy my tear-stained face. I longed to reach my room as soon as possible, and in the event I met someone on the way I must be presentable when I came into the house.

I need have felt no concern. When I arrived, I found *Los Vientos* wrapped in sleep. I went up the stairs and crept off silently to my room.

There I washed my face twice in cool water. Then, lost in desolation, I sat down and tried to sort things out.

One thing was abundantly clear: the reason Claire had never spoken of her daughter to Laney and me. Although Dominique bore the Courtney name (strangely!), Claire had evidently thought the less said about an illegitimate child the better.

Eric, according to what he had told me on the *Toucan*, had made frequent trips to Brazil from 1904 on, so he was spending much time on the Amazon when Claire arrived in 1905, seven years ago. Dominique was born one year later. Yet Claire had not married Eric, but Patrick Courtney, the wealthy rubber baron, who could build such a house as *Los Vientos* for her, surround her with servants and buy her gowns in Paris.

I now understood Patrick's denial of Dominique. Had he discovered, too late, that she was not his daughter? Or had he and Claire struck a bargain where he accepted Claire's child in name only?

Whatever the answers, Claire and Patrick had contrived to forget Dominique, without conscience or regret, apparently.

But there was one person who had not forgotten her. Her "fren."

"I know how to care for my own," Eric had said.

That night I was long in falling asleep. When I did so finally, I dreamed a dreaded dream from childhood. But this time it was not I who fell from the rowan tree, but Dominique. I watched, appalled, while she revolved in air, her short red hair switching about her face. Distraught, I ran beneath the tree to catch her, but she disappeared as she reached the lower branches.

"She's gone," I cried out, bereft.

"What did you expect?" Laney asked, arriving unexpectedly at my side. "Who can rely on a changeling?"

I awoke the next moring unrefreshed, my eyes heavy-lidded. Because of this, I forced myself to take time and care with my toilette, so that others might not know of my troubled night. Then I joined Laney, and although unable to eat breakfast, I drank strong, black coffee. Thus I fortified myself against the coming day, a day I was never to forget.

Halfway through my second cup of coffee, I heard excited voices drifting up from the courtyard. There was the sound of unusual movement throughout the house.

"Someone is arriving, I think," I said, getting to my feet. "I shall see for myself . . ."

With that, I was off down the hall. I reached the top of the stairs just as the front door opened, and man let himself into the *galeria*. He glanced up at me on the landing. We stood quite still, looking at each other.

He was an arresting person, but it was difficult to say why. He was not above medium height and he wore a white suit of the conventional sort, but I had noticed an attractive, highly-assured air about him as he entered; and his coloring was unusual—the typical sun-darkened skin making a striking contrast to eyes of such a light grey that they appeared silver. The metallic gleam of these untelling eyes was full upon me.

"Julia?" he asked tentatively.

"Patrick," I answered with a little gasp, suddenly swamped in foreboding. I lifted my skirts and hurried down the stairs. As I came up to him, words I could not stop poured out of me. "Claire? Where is she? Why is she not by your side?"

Patrick reached out and touched my shoulder. "Sit down, Julia."

"No," I answered. And then I spoke again, just above a whisper. "Claire is dead."

"Yes. She died a week agao. I could not—could not send such word to you by wireless. I caught the fastest boat I could. One that travels by night as well as by day."

"I am glad there was no wireless," I said turning away blindly.

The days following Patrick's homecoming had the overtones of a terrible dream, one from which it was impossible to awaken. I cannot remember grieving privately for my sister at this time; my hours were so filled with preoccupations and demands that I had little time alone.

I carried my grief about with me, and it seemed a familiar thing, as though I had been grieving for her in some secret part of me for a long time now.

Laney received the news of Claire's death with visible shock, afterward weeping so unrestrainedly that even I, who knew the depth of her love for Claire, was at a loss. She was not long in succumbing to the severest headache she had ever sustained and was forced to retreat to her darkened bedroom, where she remained, with Teresa in faithful attendance.

Then there was Dominique. I did not know how she had been told of her mother's death or by whom. By Patrick? I hoped by Dalma. In any case, she appeared totally unaffected by this tragic development. Perhaps she did not understand what "dying" meant, and I thought this just as well. But the disturbing atmosphere of the house must have unsettled her. She followed me about whenever she could; I often found her in my room when I returned there.

Claire was buried in Manaus. Patrick explained to me as delicately as he could, that bodies could not be returned home for burial, not on the Amazon, not in the heat. I wished he had said nothing.

A memorial service was held for Claire in one of the ancient churches of Iquitos; and, although I found the service difficult to get through, I was touched by the number of people present. There was one person conspicuous by his absence, however. Eric Sorenson.

Afterwards, riding silently back to *Los Vientos* in the carriage with Patrick, I felt tears well in my eyes time after time, but a hot wind, blowing straight into my face, always dried them instantly.

Patrick spoke just once, somewhat ruefully. "There were a great many people at the service I did not expect. Michael and Angela Carlson, among them. Are they friends of yours?"

"Yes."

"A strange sort of irony, that. The Carlsons did no more than nod to Claire when she was alive . . ."

"I am certain that was a matter of indifference to her."

"On the contrary. She was very bitter about the fact that she was never accepted by the English colony out here."

"And why was she not?" I asked angrily.

"She was an actress for one thing. And then," he added indifferently, "she was married to me."

What possible answer could I make to such a remark?

When we reached *Los Vientos* I was glad to part company with my brother-in-law. Today was the first time we had been alone together since the morning of his arrival at *Los Vientos*; and although he was all that was polite and considerate, I could not like him.

Soon I should be seeing the last of him for good, however The time had come for me to think of returning to England. But before I did so, there was one thing more to be settled. James would be calling this afternoon, as he had done each day since Patrick's return, and I should take this last troubling question to him.

When James appeared, he and I went off to the pavilion, deserted now, a place of solace and comfort when my friend was with me.

As we settled ourselves, he said, "Now that Claire is . . . gone, you are doubtless making plans."

"Yes, I shall soon be going home. But I am not able to do so immediately. Laney is unfit to travel, and Dominique seems to need me for a time yet."

James sat staring out across the water. "Had you ever thought of taking Dominique to England with you?"

"Yes. I was determined to do so, until . . ." my voice drifted away uneasily. "Recently I have wondered whether this would be possible. All I know for certain is this. I should like to take her back, above all things."

"Then do so," he said vehemently.

"I must have Patrick's permission, of course."

"Easily obtained, I should think."

"But there might be—others—who would not allow this."

He looked at me curiously, but asked no questions. "I am certain—others—have long wished for such an opportunity for Dominique."

"Then I hope all may be arranged," I replied happily; but in the next instant my happiness faded. "There is something more. And I cannot leave Iquitos until my mind is at peace on this score."

He sent me an inquiring glance. I told him, rather fiercely, of Claire's last letter, of how it had brought me to the Amazon.

"You may think my story melodramatic, may think me overwrought in the wake of Claire's death, but I am convinced she was genuinely threatened. Not simply because of the letter. I am thinking of the curious circumstances surrounding her illness. Patrick's taking her away a fortnight before our arrival. No communication from her in Manaus at any time. Patrick, her spokesman, always," I finished bitterly.

"And yet," James replied thoughtfully, "you have only to flip the coin, to find a reasonable explanation for these things. Her sudden decline and the extreme seriousness of the decline expain why he was invariably her spokesman. And there is this to be considered: your sister was attended by a fine physician in the small but excellent hospital. Do you think such a physician would not have realized if something were amiss? Finally, Courtney, as far as is known, was extremely devoted to his wife. What possible motive could he have had for poisoning her?"

"I don't know," I answered, much agitated. "My mind tells me you are right. My instincts give credence to Claire's letter. I do not like or trust Patrick Courtney."

"In that," James said ruefully, "you are not precisely alone."

"Tell me something of him."

"He is a remittance man. From a fine English family. He came to the Amazon in the 1890s, when great rubber lands were available almost for the taking. Because his family paid him so well to stay out of England, he had capital. And he had, surprisingly, a keen business sense. Also he lacked, fortunately for him, any conscience about exploiting his workers. These factors combined to make him one of the richest rubber owners on the river."

"Is he still?"

"No one knows. It is rumored that he wishes to sell *Los Vientos* and relocate in Malaya. But, then, so many other rubber owners entertain the same wish."

We sat in silence for some time, and I was soon back at my problem.

"What shall I do?" I asked. "If I leave Iquitos without attempting to discover whether there was truth in Claire's accusation, I shall be haunted by her letter always."

"There is only one way for you to be at peace about the letter," James said decisively. "We must turn it over to the British consul, who is a friend of mine. Let him decide if there is any basis for an investigation."

"Yes," I said eagerly. "And I assure you I shall abide by whatever your friend says and not allow my peace to be cut up any longer."

"Excellent. Bring the letter tomorrow."

"I shall." Then, rembering, I felt the color drain from my face. "But it will be of no use to you, after all! I tore away the part about the poison, so that Laney would not know how things stood with Claire."

"I am afraid you have destroyed whatever evidence there was then," James said quietly.

"Yes," I replied, sick at heart.

"No matter. Frankly, Julia, I made my suggestion about the letter to console you, not because I reckoned the consul would take it seriously. A polite reading only, I thought. You see, there is no evidence against Patrcik or anyone else. It was Claire's word only."

"Yes, I see," I said disconsolately.

"But we shall take another tack. Claire's doctor, Dr. Andrews, is in Iquitos at the moment. I saw him just this morning. I think, perhaps, if you met him you might be reassured. Shall

REASON

By Ruth Zimmerman

Reason tells me
that time will diminish
you in my mind.
And so
I wait for the day
when hearing your name
will not alter my pulse.
When the quiet of the telephone
will not disturb my peace.
Reason tells me
that one day
my thoughts will be as free of you
as my arms are now.
That I won't ask anyone
for news of you,
or hope for us to meet
by chance.
Reason tells me
that in time
I will stop trying
to be someone you could love
and just be me.

I fetch him here for a visit?"

"By all means, do," I said trying to rally. "It's very kind of you."

James brought Dr. Andrews to call the following afternoon; I found myself interested and highly curious from the instant the doctor entered the room. He was a tall, aristocratic-looking man, with sparse, greying hair and slightly stooped shoulders. He had a clever face, watery blue eyes behind strong glasses and a pleasant, unassuming manner. Knowing nothing of his history, I should have thought him a professor not a physician.

His condolences were correct and kind, and carried a note of genuine regret, almost of self-reproach. "The problem is, you see, though we know the causes of many fevers and tropical diseases, we still have no means of treating them satisfactorily."

"I am certain you did everything possible," I murmured uncomfortably, afterward inviting him and James to be seated, and trying to lead the subject along more general lines.

I was more successful in this. Dr. Andrews was soon enthusiastically launched on a detailed description of a treatise he was writing, comparing fevers of the Amazon to those of Malaya. He was extremely enthusiastic about his subject, which appeared to be inexhaustible.

After some ten minutes of this, I glanced across at James, who winked at me. I was forced to hide a smile. There was no question that. as James had warned, the doctor was a dead bore, but he also appeared to be a dedicated man, highly conscientious and capable. I could not imagine anything questionable occurring in his hospital without his perceiving it in an instant.

I was comforted by my meeting with Dr. Andrews. I was also delighted to see him depart.

From that time forward, my spirits began to revive. Laney, encouraged, I believe, my news of our imminent departure from *Los Vientos*, improved. James set up our bookings; we were to leave Iquitos in five days' time, on a Booth Lines ship. The bookings included passage for Dominique. A silent message from Eric, I thought.

It was still necessary, however, to go through the formality of asking Patrick's permission to take Domnique away. I did not relish seeking out my brother-in-law for any purpose and up until now had counted myself fortunate in rarely seeing him. He was away from *Los Vientos* most of the time; and I understood from Dalma he was to be absent for the next two days, riding the borders of his rubber properties.

I went that evening to his study, a rich, darkly-paneled room, just back of the morning room. I knocked and, when he bade me enter, opened the door without enthusiasm. I found him leaning over his desk, studying a map.

"I regret having to interrupt you," I said stiffly, "but there is something I should like to ask."

"Please sit down,' he answered politely, rolling up the map.

I settled uneasily on the edge of a chair. "Laney and I shall be departing from *Los Vientos* early in the coming week—"

He glanced at me sharply, but all he said was, "I expect you are looking forward to returning home after your sad journey. I did not realize, however, that suitable passage was available so immediately."

"We were fortunate to book in on a Booth liner making a fast, unscheduled run."

"I see. By special arrangement, then." He picked up a pencil and laid it down again. "And now, how may be I help you?"

"I wish—I very much wish—to take Dominique back to England with me, for a prolonged visit. I think if she spent some time in an English school—"

"But, Julia," he interrupted, "pray do not bother to explain. Your plan is a splendid one. Take her by all means, for as long as you like."

I had expected consent, but his totally insouciant manner and tone stunned me.

"Thank you," I replied coldly. "We shall be bidding you good-bye on Tuesday next, then."

"Just so."

With that he bowed. I muttered a brief, "Thank you and good evening," and left the room.

Officially, at least, all was now arranged for Dominique to accompany me to England; but I had not yet spoken directly to her of this. I did so with some trepidation.

"England is a lovely place, Dominique," I said anxiously.

"Is it like the story books?"

"Well, Greenfields is not Toad's Hall, precisely," I went on lightly. "But in Surrey you will go to a different kind of school, and you will have a real pony to ride. There are also three great, silly dogs who will take you for walks."

She laughed at that, then glanced away. "Will you be there?" she asked casually. "All the time?"

"Oh, yes, I shall be there. Greenfields is where I live, you know."

She looked back at me and gave a mouse-like sigh, no more than a tiny regretful whisper.

"Well, I should like to go to that place with you, Julia, but I can't go there now. I shall have to visit you when I get grown up, I think."

Just as I had thought, but I asked, "Why not?"

"I can't leave my fren. And Dalma might get lonesome without me."

"A pity. I am afraid I shall have to go without you, then."

I could see this did not set at all well with Dominique. She remained silent, apparently making plans of her own. Her eyes narrowed; I thought, for an instant, the old slyness touched her face. When she spoke, I could not have been more startled.

"You had better stay if you want to see Claire. She's come back again."

I knew Dominique was trying to trick me, most unpleasantly, and I began to feel angry. But I answered as gently as I could, "How do you know this? Did you see your mother?"

"No. But I smelled her perfume in the hallway."

"I do not believe you."

Dominique's eyes refused to meet mine. "Well, I thought I smelled her perfume," she replied sulkily.

"Never mind," I said, sighing in my turn, a sigh of disappointment. "When you next see your friend, why don't you ask him what he thinks of your visiting me in England? And he could explain to Dalma, I expect, so that she would understand you were coming back again sometime."

"I shall tell him," she said doubtfully, "when I see him tomorrow."

"Very well," I said.

I suspected that Dominique had met Eric every afternoon since Patrick's arrival, because I knew from James the *Toucan* was still in port. In need of repair, he explained. This I did not doubt, but I did not think it the reason the *Toucan* had remained idle in Iquitos so long.

The ensuing days were crowded ones for me. I was preparing for our return to England, and I kept as busy as I could. I called twice on Angela and left each time with a feeling of loss. Even in so short a time, I realized, I had put down fragile roots in Iquitos. I was surprised at my reluctance to tear them away. Dominique came in one day with a lighted face and declared herself ready to visit me in England.

"I shall go walking with those great silly dogs," she said.

Patrick went off to his rubber properties and once *Los Vientos* was rid of his vibrant presence, the house resumed its quite, whispering ways. One afternoon Laney surprised us all by saying she felt up to an outing at the pavilion; and Teresa, much pleased by her improvement, followed in our wake, loaded to the eyes with items designed to enhance her patient's comfort.

We went early in the afternoon, Laney pointing out that she could establish herself for *sesta* at the pavilion and thus enjoy the cooling winds as she rested. I walked, rather restlessly, along the shore. The rubber gatherers were in with their loads of raw rubber, and I watched them as usual.

The rafts and flat boats came down the river in a chain and nosed into position along the bank. Among them, oddly, was an unmanned dugout canoe, covered over with cavas. I, along with some of the rubber workers, approached it curiously and stood on the bank watching as one of the men pulled it in, tied it up and threw back the canvas.

In the canoe lay a man. It was Patrick Courtney, with an arrow through his neck.

Members of the Peruvian military took Patrick's body away that afternoon. I watched them from the balcony while the courtyard hummed with unpleasant excitement. My chest felt tight, and I could not dismiss the idea that though my life had crossed so briefly with Patrick's, it had been a fateful crossing, his death leaving a menacing stillness behind him.

Once again Laney slept in her shuttered room, under the influence of her drops; her convalescence had been too fragile to sustain another shock such as the one received this afternoon.

Dalma and Dominique were missing during this time, off to the willow grove, I was certain. I thought of Dominique in this magic place. There she would become another child a well-loved one, tossed joyfully into the air and renamed "Domino." Picturing her in such a way, I forgot or an instant the foreboding which clouded my brain and allowed me no peace.

Dalma was home again by late afternoon, because it was she, not Teresa, who brought my tea. Although the soldiers had long since departed, I was still on the balcony, now watching rain-swollen clouds ride the sky, hastening the heavy, tropical twilight.

"Your tea, *senhorita*," Dalma said.

"I shall have it later, perhaps. Thank you."

She did not leave as I expected, but came and stood beside me. Not as my servant might, but as my friend, silently present, helping me to face the end of an extraordinarily distressing day.

"You have heard?" I asked.

"A short time ago, *senhorita*."

"And Dominique?"

"I warned the servants not to speak of this sad event in her presence. I shall tell her in my own time, in my own way. She is in her room playing happily with her dolls and looking at her books at this moment."

"Splendid." Nothing more was said until I asked in a troubled voice, "Surely Mr. Courtney, after seven years on the Amazon, was well versed in the ways of the Achual Indians?"

"Oh, yes. Since *Los Vientos* is so close to the jungle, everyone in this household knows well these ways."

"Then it is odd, is it not, that he dared go into Indian territory? What could make him take such a chance?"

"No one knows. Basílio and I have spoken together of this, as have others in our house."

I frowned, trying to remember some fact, just out of reach, at the edge of my mind. And then I did remember.

A razor-sharp thrill shot through me. I turned to Dalma.

"I think it possible my brother-in-law was not killed by Indians," I said.

"I beg your pardon, *senhorita*," she countered politely, "but the soldiers saw the Achual arrow in his neck."

"But they did not see the dugout he was in, arriving with the rubber boats. It had evidently been set adrift in their wake. All craft came in together, all from *upstream*, all headed *downstream*."

There was a silence, and I knew what Dalma was thinking. If the dugout had come from the Indian territory it would have to be towed into the pavilion and tied up there to keep it from drifting back downstream.

That nameless fear again, stronger than ever. The worst kind of fear this, making me want to do foolish thing, such as whirling about to scan the shadowy room behind me.

Dalma frowned deeply. "*Senhor* Courtney struck down on his own lands? With an Achual arrow?"

"I understand none of it," I answered breathlessly. "But I must report what we have spoken of to the authorities in Iquitos. First, however, I believe I shall go to my friends the Carlsons and tell them of it—"

"Perhaps," Dalma suggested quickly, 'you might like to take Dominique and join your friends tonight. Shall I request Basílio to bring the carriage round?"

"No. Unfortunately, Miss Laneford has taken medicine which makes her sleep heavily for several hours. I should be unable to rouse her now, and I cannot leave her here. By first light she will be sufficiently wakeful for us to depart. In any case, I should not like to go at dusk, with rain beginning."

Together, we watched the first heavy drops splatter against the balcony's railings.

"You are right," Dalma replied decisively. "It is too late now. Morning will be soon enough."

I thought she had remembered suddenly, as I had done, that long strip of jungle road, a twilight place even by day, which must be traversed in order to reach Iquitos. I did not like to think of it by night, wet and dark, whispering with wind, lighted only by the dim glow of our carriage lamps, as we lumbered along.

This was a journey I had no stomach for, even had Laney been able to make the trip. But neither did I look forward to the long hours ahead of me at *Los Vientos*, waiting for day to break.

Smiling at Dalma apologetically, I said, "I admit to a nervous turn tonight, and this house has always appeared such an open one to me. Is it possible to secure it?"

"When the balcony doors, along with all others, are closed and locked, *Los Vientos* is like a fortress. *Senhor* Courtney has many times said this was so."

"I am glad to hear it. Could you see that every door is secured by nightfall?" Trying for a lighter tone, I added, "You see, I am humoring my silly nerves."

"All shall be done exactly as you wish."

A clap of thunder drowned out further speech. A burst of rain across the balcony turned us back into the sitting room.

I said, "When it is time for Dominique to sleep, please bring her to my room. We shall share my bed tonight, because of the storm. Such a great deal of thunder and lightning for a small girl to listen to all alone!"

"Very well," Dalma answred quietly, but I could feel her warm approval.

As she set out my tea, she spoke again, almost casually, "My rooms are just off the kitchen, *senhorita*, so I am in the house at all times. Basílio and many other servants are across the courtyard."

"Of course. How comfortable you make me feel, after all," I said, too heartily.

With the coming of night, Dalma and Basílio promptly closed and locked the house and lighted the sconces everywhere except in Laney's room. Had it not been for the storm our apartment would have been stifling, but cold, rainy winds blew through the shutters now and then, bringing relief. I read Dominique to sleep to the accompaniment of drumming raindrops.

I had scarcely laid my book down when I heard Laney talking in her sleep. I picked up a lamp and went into her. To my surprise, I found her sitting up in bed, looking about rather wildly.

"I do not like this business of Patrick's returning," she said in a clear voice.

I felt the flesh leap on my bones, but I said calmly, "He has not returned, Laney dear. Now lie back down, please do, and I shall put a fresh compress on your head."

"I do not wish a compress on my head," she answered crossly. "There is someone in the pavilion wearing oilskins. I saw him in a flash of lightning. It's that Patrick Courtney, I'll be bound, and I want him sent away. You must see to it, Julia."

Although I knew she spoke from a drugged condition, Laney's words were so precise and coherent, I found the lamp shaking in my hands.

I said as reasonably as I could, "Patrick is . . . is in the custody of the Peruvian military. In any case, you could not see the pavilion from here in the storm. You would have to be standing at the window just as the flash of lightning came."

"I was standing at the window," she answered cunningly.

I felt quite desperate. Laney had never before reacted to her medicine in this way. I wondered if she *had* been wandering in her room and was at a loss as to how to go on in the situation. I could think of nothing to do but remain as calm and reassuring as I could.

"You did not see Patrick," I reiterated firmly. "You must under understand that, Laney. If there is someone in the pavilion tonight, perhaps he is taking shelter there. Whatever his reason, his presence cannot affect us. I have gone to considerable pains to make certain the house is locked from top to bottom. There is no way for anyone to gain access."

"Did you lock the doors yourself?" she asked in that disconcertingly clear way.

"No. Basílio and Dalma—"

"You sent two native servants, both careless and unreliable, I venture to say, to see to such a vital matter?" Her rising voice held a trace of hysteria. Before I realized her intention, she threw back the sheet and, swinging about in bed, placed her bare feet solidly on the floor.

"It is apparent I can no longer depend upon you, Julia. I shall check the doors myself."

"Oh, no, Laney," I almost shouted.

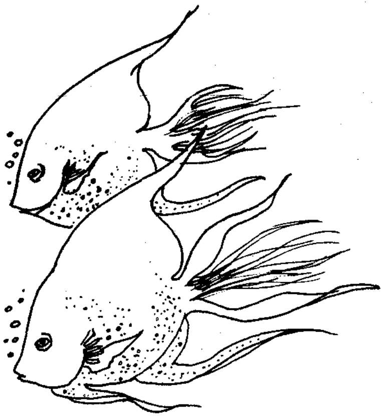
I put down the lamp, rushed across the room, and pushed her gently back into bed.

"You can count on me, I assure you. If you will lie back down and let me make you comfortable, I promise I shall go back over the house again, making certain all is secure."

As I straightened sheets and fluffed pillows, I continued to talk rapidly and soothingly, finishing with, "There now, put your head down."

She turned docile, and obeyed me meekly. Almost immediately she grew drowsy again.

"How beautiful Claire was," she murmured.



I made no answer, but stood quietly beside Laney's bed, waiting. She was asleep in a matter of minutes.

Returning to the siting room, I picked up a piece of needlework and set to work, hoping to calm myself after my encounter with Laney. I had never seen her in such a state.

Worse yet, she had planted a small doubt in my mind about the security of the house. I trusted both Dalma and Basílio, but no one is above a moment of carelessness, or exempt from distractions which might make one careless.

I laid the needlework aside. I decided I should recheck the upstairs hall at least, trying the doors of the unoccupied rooms. These Dalma and Basílio might have been less careful about, since they were routinely locked.

I went out into the hall and passed down it, trying each door vigorously. All were secured.

I was just turning back from the top of the stairs when I looked down into the *galeria* and saw the drawing room door ajar. There was no reason why the door should not be open, but I had never seen it so and some prescience made my eyes feel hot and bright as I stood looking at it.

A voice said, "You might as well come down, Julia. I know you are there."

Frozen by the shock of hearing familiar words in a voice from my childhood, I reacted, in the first instant, as a child, feeling only exasperation. Claire had found me again!

"I know you are there," she had always said. And I always was.

Dazed, I went slowly down the stairs, following the sound of the voice like a hypnotized bird, stopping finally on the threshold of the drawing room. The chandelier was not lighted, but the sconces were and in their burnished light I saw my sister sitting in an emerald chair.

She was seated to the right of her portrait, her face in profile as she stared out the French doors into the rainy night. She was so still, so unchanged, my bemused senses sent back word: not Claire at all, but another likeness of her.

Two portraits of Claire in one room . . . But, of course, if that was the way Patrick wanted it. Horrified, I remembered Patrick was dead.

I must have made a sound, and Claire turned and looked at me. The movement released me from my dream-like state. I forgot everything in a rush of gladness; my eyes stung with joy and disbelief. I did not know why she had come back in this strange way. I understand nothing except that she was alive.

I rushed toward her, my hands outstretched in greeting. But I did not get far. I was stopped by the chill in my sister's eyes as she sat silently regarding me. My arms dropped back to my sides.

"So this is the way you look, grown up," she said coldly. Then she went on peremptorily, "Turn your face towards the light. I want to see what you look like now."

Confused by this request, I obeyed without thinking. That was because I had always obeyed Claire; her four years' advantage in age had given her automatic authority over me as far back as I could remember.

When I looked at her again, she said bitterly, "Of course. Things would work out this way for you."

I could make nothing of this, and I did not try.

"Claire," I said hesitantly. "I do not know why you greet me in this fashion after so long a time Perhaps your road back to *Los Vientos* had been a hard one. However things are for you, for me, there is only this. I had not thought to see you again, and now you are here. This is quite wonderful—"

"Dear God, Julia," Claire interrupted fiercely, "must you, even now, continue to burden me with your love and trust? Now, when all is over?"

Claire's words struck me like a wall of icy water; I was so stunned I could neither move nor aswer. Who was this stranger, speaking with my sister's voice, saying words I could not believe?

"You mean," I said slowly, "that I was always a burden to you. I remember you as fond of me, playing games with me always when I wheeled you to do so, championing me with other children."

"Of course. For a while it was easy to play the role of your protector," she replied bitterly impatient, "especially since I had made you believe that the scar from your fall from the rowan tree had made you uglier than ever and that you'd probably live with it for life. Sometimes I even felt sorry for you. Or perhaps that was because I often waked in the night and was afraid, remembering what I had done."

The room grew very still. Her eyes widened and turned a deeper gold. "You never knew, did you, that I pushed you from the rowan tree?"

Perhaps if Claire had not spoken those last words, I should have gone on forever, unable to recognize her as my enemy. But in the instant of her taunting declaration, I remember, and knew she spoke the truth. The dream figure of my "fall" had a face at last and it was Claire's.

"No. I never knew, until now," I replied in a voice I scarcely recognized as my own. "Why did you do it?"

"I was always jealous of you," she replied simply. "Everyone loved you best, even our cold-hearted father loved you. In his way. And day by day you grew more beautiful . . ."

Feeling a pain in my forehead, I put my hand up to shade my eyes, even though the light was not strong. When I lifted my hand away, I looked at my sister and saw her clearly for the first time in my life. She was indeed a stranger, a vicious, cruel one.

What did this stranger, hating me so, want of me now?

My mind grew keen and wary. And afraid. Not of Claire now. I was not afraid to be alone with her in this room. I was as strong as she, Dalma and Basílio were not far away.

But I knew she had come home for a purpose, and the purpose frightened me. I thought it might not be aimed at me only, but at Laney and Dominique as well. Particularly Dominique. I must discover the purpose if I were to make the three of us safe. I had to know where the threat was coming from, so that I might know which way to turn.

"You were never ill," I said. "You lured me to the Amazon with a lie."

"Quite true."

"Where have you been all this time?" I asked.

"Hidden out in Manaus until the last two days. Since then, ensconced in the quarters above the stables where Basílio used to live. If it suited me, I came into my own apartment."

She lifted some keys strung on a thing gold chain and waved them back and forth in the dancing light.

In spite of myself, I shivered.

"Why have you come back?"

She smiled at me, making no answer.

"I shall tell you why," I said. It was no more than a wild thrust, born of desperation at her silence. "Whatever your plan, Patrick was your accomplice. You came home to see him today. Yesterday you found him gone, and today when he returned to you, you found him dead. Your scheme has gone awry."

"Not in the least," she replied cooly. "It is true Patrick and I planned together to bring you to the Amazon, but in the end he refused to carry out his part. He sold *Los Vientos* for a song and was leaving for the Malay States. Alone. Running out. A weak man who almost destroyed everything."

"You killed him."

"Not I. Why should I, when there was no need?" Claire mocked. "When half-starved *serinquerios* will turn on their own masters for a few *milreis*? All so easy."

That was when my fear came, pure fear. And the hammerblows of my heart made it almost impossible to think. But this much I knew. If Claire had arranged for Patrick's death, then she had other accomplices. And if she could not be locked out of *Los Vientos*, neither could they.

Perpsiration drenched my body. Cold with terror, I swung around.

The squat Portuguese who had come aboard the *Toucan* at Ilha do Careiro stood just behind me, silent, alert. He was holding a cushion in his hand. As I opened my mouth to scream, he clapped the pillow over my face.

A struggle, for me a terrible one, ensued. It did not last long. Just once during that time, I managed to jerk my face free, to draw in air; then the pillow came down harder than ever, fat moist hands caught me at the nape of my neck and pushed my head into a grimy, heaving chest.

"There," the Portuguese muttered, with a gasp of satisfaction.

"And none too soon," another familiar voice said. "This tigerish creature will raise the household yet, if we don't take care."

"Then get on with it," Claire advised viciously, from somewhere close at hand.

As she spoke, a man's thin, strong fingers caught my wrist and held my arm cruelly rigid. I felt a needle prick. After that, my assailant loosened his hold slightly. I could breathe again. But I no longer wished to struggle.

A sensation of lightness came over me. My body seemed to float above the floor.

"And now that you are in hand, Julia dear," Claire went on in her mocking voice, "I shall answer your question about why I brought you to the Amazon. For your fortune, of course. Why else?"

I longed to speak, to tell Claire I would have shared what our father bequeathed to me, had she but asked; my lips refused to move.

As though she read my thoughts, she said contemptuously. "Not part of the fortune. I needed it all."

After that I heard nothing more and, disembodied, drifted into dreamless dark.

I awakened into the half-light of breaking day and found myself lying on a hard surface on my back; a fine rain coated my upturned face. Above me I saw purplish sky, streaked with lines of apricot light.

Afraid to make a sound, I listened. I could hear water lapping around me and after a time I reached out through shadowy air, feeling for boundaries. My exploring fingers met rough, peeling wood, bent in a curve.

The side of a boat.

Frantically, I turned my head and saw dark plumey treetops floating by. No, it was the other way around; I was floating past the trees. I knew then, and I put my hand to my mouth to stifle a cry.

I was in a canoe, moving gently, inexorably down a river. The Jurepé, without any question. It could not be otherwise.

The ultimate nightmare, and I was awake. I pressed my hand harder against my mouth and closed my eyes. Tears slid out from under my eyelids and ran in hot paths down my cheeks. The canoe, caught in the slow current, continued its silent way downstream;

each passing minute carried me nearer to my rendezvous with death.

How long I lay inert, lost, I do not know. But it was at last borne in upon me that I might still be some distance from Achual territory, and a faint stirring of hope brought me first to one elbow, then to a sitting position.

Looking about me, I saw I was midriver, carried by a slow easy current. The misty banks were turning greener; there was considerably more light than before.

I swept the boat with my eyes. Then, getting on my knees, moving with care each time I shifted position, I searched the boat thoroughly. There was nothing but the thick piece of canvas I had lain on.

Any hope of finding a forgotten oar, overlooked in the folds of the canvas, was soon dispelled. A foolish hope, in any case. Nevertheless, I was acutely disappointed, and in my terrified state, disappointment led to despair.

I decided I could not afford despair. Some distance ahead of me was a bend in the river, and I knew nothing of what lay beyond that bend; but it was, I felt intuitively, the last turn before disaster. I could not wait.

I forced my attention back to the dark somber waters of the river and was faintly cheered to see that the nearest bank was not far away. I could swim a little and I thought it likely that I might negotiate this distance without great difficulty. Once I reached shore, I could follow the river back upstream, thereby making certain I did not lose my way.

Two disturbing questions presented themselvs. How far had I come? Was there beach all the way, as there was here, or would I find trees growing to the banks in many places, forcing me to pass through the edge of the jungle?

I refused to weigh these unsettling considerations. There was no time. I stood up carefully in the canoe and, when I found myself quite steady in this position, began to work at the buttons at the back of my skirt. The skirt, deeply flounced, was heavy with mud and dampness. I would swim to shore in blouse, camisole and a single petticoat.

It was while my trembling fingers were occoupied with the buttons that I saw something I had not seen before, patches of Salvinia ferns, further down the river. With a gasp of horror, I sat down.

The canoe rocked dangerously. I closed my eyes, trying to cut out visions of piranhas in the black shadows of the ferns, their jaws opening and closing hungrily.

My one possible escape route was cut off. I drew my knees up, crossed my arms on them, and put my head down. This wav I should not be able to see the Achual arrows when they came. The aim would be practiced and deadly; perhaps I would never know when the arrows struck. I sat on (how long?) while the river mists drifted back and forth across me.

Suddenly, somewhere deep in the jungle, a *sabiá*, which is one of the few birds in the world that sings in the rain, filled the air with its heart-piercing song. I raised my head and listened. And listening, I decided once again, I could not sit and wait for death.

There was no way for me to escape from the river, alone. My only hope was to delay until help could reach me. And I must believe that help was on the way, although I had no means of reckoning how matters stood at *Los Vientos*.

This much I was certain of, my three assailants would have fled after starting me on my deadly journey downriver. Surely Dalma, expecting me to go into Iquitos today, would discover early that I was missing. She must have raised an immediate alarm. A search party, I told myself, had undoubtedly left *Los Vientos* at dawn. They were on their way at this moment.

The sun was moving brightly across the river melting the mists away. The searchers would have no difficulty seeing me. Neither, I thought, my heart leaping, would the Achuals. Looking over my shoulder, I saw I was much closer to the bend in the river than I had known. Sitting in my canoe, I was a perfect target.

The thought took my breath away but I did not change my position. The sun, pinpointing me on the river, had compensated by showing me something that gave me fragile hope.

For the first time, I saw reeds, lily pads and other patches of vegetation rising out of the water. Perhaps, without knowing, I had passed such plants all night. Now, in the new light, when the canoe came near to them, I could reach out and hold onto these plants, thus delaying my terrifying progress.

This I began to do, holding on desperately until the jointed stems of the reeds broke off in my hands. The razor-sharp blades of other plants cut my palms, but I did not let go until rotting roots gave way. Sometimes I gained seconds, sometimes minutes.

Once I discovered a decaying tree trunk thrust up out of the water, and leaning out dangerously, dug my fingernails into its spongy bark. When pieces of the bark gave way, I grabbed at others, digging in until my fingernails were broken and bleeding. I paid no attention to this, but noted triumphantly how several minutes passed before the rotting tree uprooted and floated off in the current.

I was deeply absorbed in my task, more reckless, more successful now. I cared nothing for burning sunlight and bloody hands. I felt light-hearted and queer, but my thoughts were pleasant, concentrated entirely upon my rescue. Not certain where to look for me, the search party, I decided, would divide. I knew, in a kind of dreaming clarity, Eric would be the one to find me. He would think of the river.

Soon now, he would come swiftly past in another canoe, shooting down the Jurepé like a streak of light, intercepting me. I awaited his coming patiently, looking up often to see if he were in sight. And so, when he did come I felt no surprise. It was the way he arrived that startled me.

He came, not by river, but along the beach, running at full speed in long, easy strides. His shirt was glued to his chest, his face, glistening with sweat, was so intense it had a carved look. He passed me, raised his hand and ran on without breaking stride.

Some way down the beach he stopped abruptly and stood for seconds with his hands on his hips, looking first at me, then at the shore, measuring distances with narrowed eyes. It was not until that instant I realized his intention.

"No!" I called in a harsh, strangled voice.

He drew in a racking breath, closed his eyes once, opened them, and stepped lightly backward. Then he ran forward and hit the waters of the Jurepé in a long shallow dive.

A scream rose in my throat and caught there. I lowered my head so I could not see and clapped my hands to my ears, pressing hard—in case there were sounds I could not bear to hear.

Eons seemed to pass, but it could only have been seconds before the boat rocked and Eric threw himself over the side and fell into the bottom of the canoe. A prolonged shiver ran the length of his body.

"No piranhas," he said tonelessly.

He sat up and with a visible effort schooled himself to quietness.

"Oh, Eric!"

Two words only, but they encompassed all I felt for this man—they sang with relief at his safety—they were filled with wonder. I, who had not known I was loved, could only marvel at being loved so much.

"I told you I should not let you go easily," he said, sending me a shining look. "I have waited for you all my life."

"Not Claire . . . ?"

"Never Claire."

I did not understand, but I believed. "I knew you would come for me," I said simply.

"But I have not made you safe even yet, my Julia. Beyond that bend is Achual territory. At this moment we are being watched, unquestionably."

Almost as he spoke, he dropped over the side into the water. He began to swim, towing the boat with difficulty; but after a short distance he touched bottom, thus gaining leverage to work the canoe on into shore.

As he reached for me and swung me out onto the bank, he said softly, "Do not look over your shoulder, and make no moves which might be construed as threatening. Walk with purpose, as tough anxious to return upstream without delay. If something frightens you, do not run."

I followed his directions as best I could; and if, as we set out my bones seemed to melt at the thought of Eric and me receiving arrows in our backs, I tried to give no sign.

Eric set a brisk, unhurried pace, and we walked out of the Achual country together. It was a walk I never forgot.

Some two hundred yards down the beach, he slowed his steps and I, swamped in weariness, sighed. I had maintained our pace with the greatest difficulty, particularly at the last. My lacerated hands, which I kept closed into tight fists as we went, were stinging furiously.

"Rest here," he said, establishing me on a smooth warm rock at the edge of the trees. "We are safe now. If the Achuals had wished to attack us, they would have done so before now. Certainly there was no lack of opportunity."

My mind accepted this judgement, but my body, slow to respond to the miracle of our escape, was still taut and tingling. Too tired to question, I watched with curiosity as he went to a beached, waterlogged canoe and hunted out a section of a paddle which was split in half.

He then crossed to a sapopema tree and hit the paddle hard against the tree trunk several times. Afterward, he paused and waiting, listening. Before long we heard faint booms replying from the jungle.

Throwing the broken paddle aside, he came to my rock and stood looking down at me.

"Jim Merriweather, with a full search party, will be coming to meet us soon. This was to be our signal, if . . . . when you were found."

He pulled me to my feet, and for a fleeting instant, held me hard against him; but he did not kiss me—then. Instead he swung me into his arms and carried me to the base of the sapopema tre, where he deposited me on a pile of sun-warmed grasses.

"Since you are to be the wife of a riverboat captain," he said lightly, "you must learn to make yourself comfortable in strange places. This is the way in the jungle."

He dropped down beside me, put his arm around me, and pulled my head against his shoulder. The branches of the sapopema, swaying in winds from the river, cooled us in their shifting shadows; the great wings of the tree's trunk isolated us from the world.

Here I felt safe, at last, and the tightness left my body. My hands fell open in my lap, revealing bloodstained palms.

Eric seeing, asked in a steel-edged voice, "Is this what Claire and her hired assassins did to you?"

"Oh, no. They conducted their attack in a highly civlized fashion. A pillow in the face, pushed there by the Portuguese who boarded the *Toucan* at Ilha dol Careiro—"

"Decio Lampreia. His association with the Courtneys has been of long standing. Patrick had need of him on many occasions, and Decio's price was not high. Later I shall tell you what he was doing aboard the *Toucan*. But first I must know this. Was Geoffrey Andrews the second man involved in the attack?"

"Yes. The 'splendid' Dr. Andrews of Manaus. I recognized his voice, just before he skillfully administered an injection."

"So that was how he did it," Eric answered grimly. "No surprise to find Decio mixed up in this, but Andrews? Obviously he agreed to hide Claire away in his private hospital, lying about her health, later signing a false death certificate, doing both things at great risk to himself. And no question he followed through to the letter, because Jim and I

◆

TIDES

By Barbara Reid

Away from him, she thought of all the phrases
Loving had. Bitter words from some brackish small
Dark pool ripped through their quarrel,
Estranging them, like vines with a single root,
Possessed but not possessing any longer.
And it began, her desperation, the endless stasis
Of her grief, but not for him, but what they knew.
Alone, when it was over, her unrelenting face
Gave way to tears, and weariness, an atrophying
Of the bone, harsh pounding of the blood, and memories
Fast-falling, bliding, bewildering like snow
In a savage winter, drifting down, and down.

That wonder could return astonished her.
It was as if the stars had seeded in the ocean,
Or a butterfly had lived beyond its season
Winging into the light-drenched still, white sky.
"Do you hear me?" Out of their lost emotion,
Borne on that seismic wave, the last crest washing in,
She heard his distant voice, clear, sad, marveling.
She was amazed how love went out to things.
Shells they had collected sang with their words.
And she was cleansed and emptied like this shell,
Left keening like this shell
Washed in the salt of the rip
Of the dark green tides running over
And over. How pure her grieving
Has left her.
Sea-folded and flung
Into light. Listen.
Now they are grieving together.

checked. Everything appeared shipshape. Now why would he take such a risk?"

"I imagine Claire and Patrick agreed to pay him a large sum of money."

"They had no money left. Like the other rubber barons, their wealth was in land, and the rubber estates of the Amazon are doomed. Everyone is trying to sell out and recoup his fortune on the Malay Peninsula."

"Claire may not have had money, but she had prospects," I said quietly. "When our father died, he left her a handsome competence—which she evidently lost no time in dissipating—but Greenfields and the bulk of his fortune came to me. In the event of my death, however . . ."

"First Dominique," he said in a soft, ominous voice. "Now you. It's time, at last, for Claire and me to reckon scores."

I surprised myself by yawning nervously, like a child. "Did Claire accompany the others when . . . when they put in the boat."

"No. She was seen after you were taken away, crossing the yard through a shaft of light from a window, running for the stables."

"Who discovered I was gone?"

"Dalma. She felt a strong draught blowing through the house, and when she investigated, found the front door open. She saw you being carried away, and attempted to follow, but lost sight of the three of you in the rain and dark. She was able to identify Decio, and she thought, Andrews, before she ran back to the house to raise the alarm. Basílio brought word to Iquitos. I returned with him, while Jim remained in town, organizing a search party to go into the jungle at daybreak. He also planned to alert the port authorities. All outgoing ships are being watched by now."

"How did you find me?"

"I almost didn't, although I was right in believing you were taken to the river. My mistake was starting out at night, by lantern light. As it turned out, I should have gained time by waiting for daylight, but—well—I couldn't wait. The only boats at the pavilion were those used by the *serinqueiros*. These canoes are always in poor repair, but in the dark I must have selected the least sound of the lot. It was leaking before I had gone any distance, and I lost time bailing. By the time I reached this point, the canoe was waterlogged. In my attempt to beach her, I put a heavy strain on the paddle, which split in two. It was full morning by then, and I could see you ahead of me, much too close to the bend in the river. Once on shore I started running—I had no plan—except to reach you."

"Oh, Eric."

These words, once again, seemed to say all that needed saying. Eric pulled my face around and brushed my lips with his. It was the lightest of kisses, but it made my head spin.

Settling me back against his shoulder, he said, "Now about Dominique."

I sat waiting, barely breathing.

"I am not her father, as I know you think. She is my brother Knute's child, and Claire's. She is illegitimate. Knute and Claire were to have been married after his last jungle trip. But, as I told you, he never returned. After his disappearance, Claire came to me and demanded all Knute had left in the way of an estate. I gave it to her, of course. It was little enough. She married Patrick two months later, and her money troubles were at an end. For years they lived like emperors with no limit to their extravagances. But they saw an end to their way of life with the rubber boom decline and were immediately caught up in feverish plans for exodus to the Far East. To reestablish there, however, once again, required money, quite a lot of it. . . ."

Trying to brush aside the thought of how nearly Claire came to acquiring the fortune she longed for, I asked abruptly, "Did Patrick know Dominique was not his?"

"Oh, yes. For Claire's sake he gave Dominique his name, but he disliked her intensely from the moment she was born. Claire was excruciatingly bored with her. From the first, I had had an extremely low opinion of Claire and, unfortunately, had made no attempt to hide my feelings; she took swift revenge when Dominique was born. I was not received at *Los Vientos*, not at any time allowed to see my niece. I had no legal claim, of course."

"So you worked through Dalma."

"Yes. I brought her and Basílio from Manaus and sent them to the Courtneys to apply for positions. Such fine servants are not easily come by—they were installed immediately. Since that time Basílio, Dalma, and I have looked out for Dominique as best we could."

I felt tears burn my eyes, and lowered my lids quickly.

"So, you see," Eric went on, "why I was prepared to dislike you, determined to dislike you, when you came aboard the *Toucan*. I knew immediately who you were from the information given me by the officer of the *Star of Brazil* who booked your passage."

"I could not help being Claire's sister."

"That was only part of it. I could not forgive you for what I thought was your neglect of Dominique. An aunt in England, who in all these years had not written her a letter, or so much as sent her a small present . . . ."

"I didn't know of her existence. Claire never told me she had a daughter."

"I found that out later. I had started to suspect it when I saw how avidly curious you were about everything connected with *Los Vientos*. You would have made some inquiry about a niece you had never seen, surely."

"And I thought you avoided me because . . . because, well, I am so unlike Claire. Not, not—"

"Julia," he cut me off, giving me a gentle but exasperated shake, "Don't you know how beautiful you are?"

"No, I do not," I replied crisply. "And what was I to think," I continued, remembering, feeling suddenly aggrieved, "when *you* sught me out only at *sesta* and in private places. The day we met at Angela's house, you did not so much as approach me . . ."

"I did not dare. Which brings me back to Decio and Patrick. Your wireless, sent from Belém, saying you were arriving on the *Toucan*, apparently disturbed Patrick very much. He had no idea what I might tell you, or how things might be with you and me, together for twenty days on shipboard. Patrick sent Decio to Ilha do Careiro to warn me and Jim Merriwether. When you saw him coming aboard the *Toucan* I didn't want to tell you about your brother-in-law's association with him and, of course, later I found out from Jim about their conversation.

"He said that if either Jim or I revealed any unsavory facts about Patrick, he, Patrick would expose Dominique's illegitimacy. In the early days of the Courtney marriage this would not have been a valid threat, because Claire's reputation, too, would have suffered. Patrick, besotted by Claire in those days, would never have done such a thing no matter what the gain. But their marriage had cooled into a calculating partnership, and he was a unpredictable man. And a desperate one. Certainly that was an attempt on your life in Ilha do Careiro inspired by Patrick and carried out by someone Decio hired. It was then I knew two things—I must keep you under constant watch and warn you. And I knew how I felt about you. But I couldn't take any chances. From the time the *Toucan* docked in Iquitos, Decio kept me under constant watch."

"It would have made a great difference if I had known this."

"Again, I didn't dare. I knew how intimate you were with Miss Laneford, how you must share your secrets with her. And I recognized her for my enemy."

"You misjudge—"

I was interrupted by a familiar booming signal, now close at hand.

"Jim," Eric said.

He got instantly to his feet and helped me to mine. Then picking up the piece of paddle again, he hit a fin of the sapopema tree again, just once.

"Will he be certain to hear?" I asked, worrying.

"One strike only, on the second signal—if you were found—unhurt. He will know by now there is not to be a second strike."

Dear James, I thought, as I stood swaying with weariness.

"And now," Eric continued, "you are to forget all troubling matters, and have a fine *sesta* in the dugout Jim will bring. He and I shall paddle you back to *Los Vientos* together. There is no question of his having a canoe in hand. Jungle search parties must carry one in order to get over the *igapôs*, the 'flooded forests' which are always encountered along the way."

In a short time, I saw four men emerging from the trees with an upturned canoe over their heads. There were three pair of black legs and one pair of sturdy, rosy-bronze ones, all encased in ragged trousers, marching toward us under the dugout.

"The lighter legs at the forward end of the boat," Eric explained hastily, "belong to an Indian guide named Waiwai. He is a friend of Jim's, and has been since they roamed the jungle together as boys in Manaus. Don't be alarmed when you see his face."

Before the concealed faces became visible, however, James stepped silently out of the jungle only a few feet away from us. Carrying a rifle, he came forward in an easy stride, saying pleasantly, "Oh, there you are, Julia, all accounted for."

I smiled inwardly at this characteristic greeting; but when he reached me, he surprised me with a further, totally uncharacteristic salute. He leaned over and kissed my cheek. Quite overcome, I responded by throwing my arms around his neck in an impulsive embrace.

When I pulled away, I was amused to see Eric's dark brows drawing together in disapproval, but his good manners forebade comment under the circumstances. In the next moment, the many-legged canoe distracted us all by walking past us to the river.

Once the dugout was upright in the water, the blacks retreated some distance down the beach. Waiwai, however, joined us and, planting himself firmly at James's side, crossed his arms over his bare chest.

"Julia," James siad, "this is an old friend of mine from the Napo tribe. His name is Waiwai."

It was a moment before I could respond. Waiwai came further forward until he stood within inches of my face. From this excellent new position, he studied me with the deepest interest.

I had no choice but to study him back. He wore a brimless, flat-topped hat, like that of a Catholic cardinal, set squarely on his head. It was made entirely of bright red toucan feathers. His face was lavishly streaked with red and blue coloring; bamboo, in feathered tufts, adorned his ears.

"How do you do?" I inquired with a gasp.

No answer. James turned to him and said something in the strangest language I had ever heard.

"Waiwai does not speak English," James explained kindly.

"No matter," I replied, breathless. "Please tell him I am delighted to have made his acquaintance."

An acquaintance, I decided, which had small chance of ripening into friendship. At least on my part.

Eric, who appeared to be having some difficulty hiding his amusement, joined me and gently guided me out of range of Waiwai's fascinated gaze.

"It's the mud on your face, I think," Eric suggested wickedly, as he established me in the canoe. "He undoubtedly thinks you are wearing a splendid new disguise."

As Eric turned to rejoin the other two, I took a final, furtive look at Waiwai. And I came to the conclusion that James, for all of his ready acceptance in Amazon society, had some extremely peculiar friends on the side.

The three men continued to confer and I, swept by another wave of exhaustion, found myself unable to stay upright any longer. Thinking a moment's rest almost obligatory, I lay down in the bottom of the boat and closed my eyes.

I remembered nothing more until I awakened to the swish of paddles, and found myself still prone on the bottom of the canoe, rocking gently back and forth as the dugout raced homeward up the Jurepé. I lay luxuriously still, not bothering to open my eyes. When it suited me to do so, I listened.

"No trace of Decio and Andrews, you say?" This was Eric's voice. "They arranged to have a chartered vessel waiting surely. Do you suppose they made it past the port authorities after all?"

"I doubt they have reached Iquitos yet. They must have spent much time getting Julia into the canoe, well down-river, and well out into the current, so there could be no question of her not reaching Achual country. Don't forget, all this had to be accomplished in the dark, in the rain. Waiwai thinks it likely they planned to follow the overload *serinquiro* trail, but that daylight caught them, forcing them into the jungle for cover, while they waited for night again."

"And not expecting to be delayed, not wishing to be encumbered by an outsider," Eric added with relish, "they doubtless ended up in the jungle without a guide. I don't envy them their stay."

"Especially since the word has got out to every starving Indian and *serinqueiro* by now, that they are there and probably carrying at least their passage money in gold."

After a short silence, Eric asked grimly, "And Claire? Did you hear anything of her as you passed *Los Vientos* this morning? It seems someone saw her running toward the stables . . ."

"A mistake, Dalma says. How could Claire have been seen at *Los Vientos* last night when she died in Manaus some time ago?"

There was a curious little pause.

Eric said softly, "So that's the way the wind blows, is it?"

"It is possible, Dalma maintains, that someone might have seen Claire's *spirit*, however."

"And does Dalma know what might have happened to this highly active spirit?"

"She thinks," James said carefully, "it was claimed by the evil god of the black *macumba*, Exú."

"This is the first I've heard of Dalma taking notice of the *macumba*, much less explaining what Exú is about these days."

"Nevertheless, every servant in the place backs her totally. How could it have been otherwise, they ask? When a spirit disappears in the wink of an eye, one can be assured this is Exú's work."

"It seems," Eric answered in a satisfied voice, "that Exú has been most thorough."

"No question of it," James replied.

When we reached Los Vientos I was ordered off to my room for a proper rest. Teresa insisted on helping me out of my sodden, muddy clothing and into a fresh nightdress. Dalma brought me a tray of cooled tea and sliced fruits. I was nodding before I finished my refreshment and had to forego what was left.

As I settled into bed and let my head fall to a cool, immaculate pillow, Dalma said, "I understand you and the captain are to be married soon, *senhorita*. I wish to offer my felicitations."

"Thank you," I answered drowsily, but as I drifted off to sleep, I thought: Drat the man! In a matter of minutes he has told everyone in the house we are engaged, and he hasn't even proposed!

After a long and dreamless sleep, I awakened to *Los Vientos* at dusk. Winds whispered through the house; a flock of wild canaries settled on my balcony. Laney, to my surprise, sat in the scarlet chair across the room, staring out the window. Her face looked white and drawn, lined with sadness.

"Laney?"

"Ah, you are awake Julia. I have been reassured several times . . . you are no worse for the terrible ordeal you have undergone, I understand. But I sould like to hear you say so."

"I am quite myself again, Laney. Now I have slept."

"Then there are things I must say to you immediately. Many things. Many of these things should have been said long ago."

I started to speak. "No, do not interrupt," she continued, and something in her tone silenced me.

Laney's hands fluttered in her silken lap. "It is difficult to know where to begin. With the greatest disservice I ever did you, perhaps? Again, that would be keeping silent when I should have spoken. You see, I knew your fall from the tree was no accident. I saw Claire push you. I told no one. I watched constantly, afterward, trying to keep you safe from her always, but the only way of making you truly safe was to tell you what I had seen. I could not. I was afraid your father might send her away."

"Could he have done so?" I asked bewildered.

"Of course. He could do anything he pleased. And because I loved Claire I have remained silent about many things."

"You cannot be blamed for loving her."

"No. Although she was not always easy to love. But blood is thicker than water. Claire was my daughter."

Too stunned to speak, I simply stared at Laney. Then abruptly I turned my head and looked out across the balcony. The wild canaries were gone.

"You and my father . . . ?" I asked, facing her again.

"Hard for you to imagine, I suppose," Laney replied, with an odd little smile. "But when I was young, I was not unattractive. And your father, although remote and selfish, was a man of immense charm, when he chose to employ his charm. I, unused to attention from such a man, was overwhelmed."

"But his first wife, Eva?"

"A spineless, sickly sort of creature. He took her at one time to the South of France for two years—a place he very much enjoyed himself, incidentally—for her health. I met him there. I was governess to an English family, on holiday. When my employers returned to England, Richard offered me a position as nurse-companion to Eva. This arrangement suited Richard and me perfectly. In the second year, I found myself pregnant with his child."

Claire and Dominique, I thought. Patterns, repeating themselves.

"When your father discovered my condition, he set me up in a separate establishment. Claire was born two weeks after Eva's death. But time had already run out for Claire and me; Richard had met your mother. Whether he had thought of marrying me at any time, I have no idea. From this point on, he certainly did not.

"He was, however, not totally without conscience. He made this offer: he would adopt Claire, but she would never be his heir. I was, if I chose, to have a permanent home at Greenfields, as her nurse. I accepted; I had no choice. Two years later he married your mother, the only person he ever truly loved, I think. Another two years passed and you were born. I became the nanny in the house, a position I never escaped, one I finally learned to accept."

"Poor Laney," I said. And then to my surprise, I added, "Poor Eva. There was not a single likeness of her anywhere in the house. Not even a small photograph."

"Claire destroyed them all in a fit of pique one day because Eva, her 'mother,' was so plain and unprepossessing, as compared to yours. Again, I said nothing. Your father did not even notice the photographs were missing."

Laney paused, then went on sadly, "Yes, poor Eva. But I advise you to withhold any sympathy for me until you have heard the rest. I was bitterly resentful of my position as nursemaid in the house of my former lover, I hated your other, and I thought I should hate you, too—especially you. But once you were in my care, I could not do so. You were the most engaging child imaginable. But still I watched you jealously, hoping always that Claire might gain the ascendancy in your father's affections. What an impossible dream. They were at war with each other from the beginning."

"So Claire never knew she was your daughter?"

"Never. I should not have dared to tell her. How much more contemptuous she would have been of me, than of her 'mother' even."

Laney looked so disturbed I was at a loss as how to comfort her. "You must begin to forget the past. You must forget Claire, who is dead . . ."

She seemed not to have heard, evidently plagued by another distressing memory. "There is one more thing," she added. Her voice was so low it was almost a whisper.

"Over the years, despite my firm intention of not doing so, I grew so fond of you, and I was afraid someone would take you away from me. I should have no one then. Claire was gone forever . . ."

In my shock, I was still for a time. Finally, "Eric told me this of you. I would not believe this."

"You may believe him now. He knew, because I could not hide my fear of him. He was the first real threat who had come our way. The only men you were acquainted with at home were childhood friends. James, although most engaging, you took immediately as another friend. Captain Sorenson was quite a different matter; I could feel the magnetism between you and I grew frightened. Here was a man who would take you away from me completely—and from England—to the ends of the earth. That day on the *Toucan* when I found you together, I was so alarmed, I gave up all subtleties and hints, and lied to you deliberately.

I felt clear and cold. My voice rang when I spoke. "Yes. You lied to me, most cruelly, at a time when my life's happiness hung in the balance. I shall not forgive you readily, Laney."

"I do not expect your forgiveness," she answered, getting unsteadily to her feet. She crossed the room, paused at the door, and without turning back said in a strange voice, "And I do not forgive myself. I shall not let myself off lightly for what I have done."

Refreshed by a long sleep, I rose early the next morning and dressed leisurely. As I sipped a *cafezinho*, left by Teresa, a warm wind entered the room and sent the mosquito netting billowing about my bed. In the distance, fields of sugarcane were already filling with blinding, gold light.

Hearing a small knock, I turned. Dominique's face, shining with excitement, appeared around the edge of the door. When she saw me she threw the door wide, rushed across the room and asked in a joyful, conspiratorial voice, "What do you think, Julia?"

"Tell me."

"My fren is here. Here in my house. He brought me a book about an alligator who smokes a pipe and attends *carnaval* And he sent me on a secret mission to your room."

"What were you meant to discover on this mission?"

"Whether you were awake."

"I am, you see," I answered, laughing.

"Then the rest of my secret mission is to stay here and look at my book, while you meet my fren in the morning room."

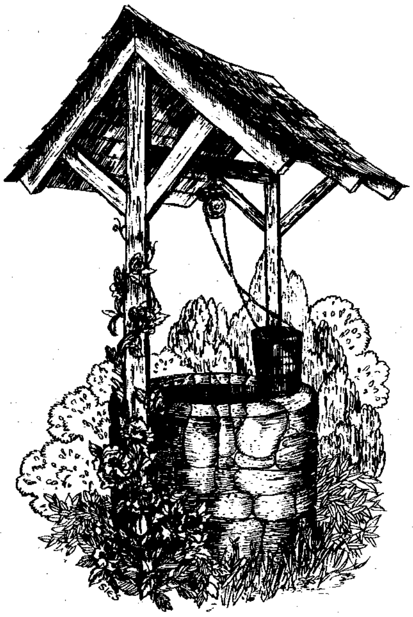
"Very well," I answered, feeling cautiously shy suddenly.

When I reached the morning room and went through the door, I found Eric standing on the terrace. He was wearing his uniform, immaculate as always, every button on his jacket fired with sunlight. I thought with Dominique, "He's tall as a tree and he shines."

He turned and looked at me for a time before he said, "Good morning, Julia dear. I came so early because I am taking the *Toucan* on a rubber run today, and I could not leave without seeing you once more. And I thought it quite in order to tell you of our wedding plans."

"We have made 'our' plans, then?" I asked drily.

"Of course. Three days from now we shall be married by special license, which I have here," he said, patting his breast pocket.



I had the distinct impression that I still had not been proposed to; but when he crossed the room and stood looking down at me, I was so confused by his nearness that I forgot to be indignant.

"I had another reason for coming," he said softly. "It occurred to me that in the confusion yesterday, I had forgot to kiss you properly."

Before I knew what was happening, he caught my chin in strong fingers, lifted my face, and laid a lovely, burning kiss across my mouth.

When we finally pulled apart, Eric said in that same soft voice, "Just think, my darling Julia, of years and years of this sort of thing. All ahead of us."

"I'm thinking," I replied so fervently that he laughed.

I joined in, thereby fulfilling another of my secret longings: Captain Sorenson calling on me one bright day at *Los Vientos*, where our spontaneous, mingled laughter could be head, coming from the morning room.

It is difficult to believe four years have passed since the day Eric came to *Los Vientos* to tell me of our marriage plans. One of those years, we say, does not count, because we were apart then, Eric having joined the Royal Navy to fight for England when the Great War broke out in England. But even with a missing year, we are more fortunate than most, because Eric scarcely limps at all. This, in spite of the fact that he was mustered out of the navy with a piece of shrapnel in his ankle. And every day we count ourselves fortunate in another way: we have a three-year-old son, Jim, who is the joy of our lives.

James Merriweather did not live long enough to know of the war, nor did he ever see his namesake. He died of yellow fever in the spring of 1913.

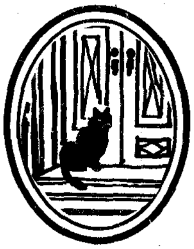
Dominique attends school in England, spending her holidays at Greenfields, a place she is coming to love with deep affection, according to my two elderly maiden aunts who make their home there now. She shows promise of becoming a brilliant scholar; I dream she may one day wish to attend a women's university.

Now that the rubber boom is over the flourishing, fabled cities of the Amazon have gone quietly back to sleep. Manaus, however, remains a thriving port, dealing in other commodities. Eric and I, with our fleet of four riverboats, make our headquarters there.

Iquitos is no more than a small, drowsy village now. Laney, with her faithful servant, Teresa, lives near the center of town, occupying one of the ugly, English houses made of iron. People who know Laney's dislike of all things Brazilian declare themselves amazed she remains. She could have returned to Greenfields, of course, or, since she is a person of some means, gone back to Virginia Water and purchased the flower-scented cottage she always planned to own one day. But she stays on.

She never speaks of England, nor of the past. One wonders how she spends the long hot days. When I am in Iquitos, I visit her without fail.

And there, in her iron house on the Amazon, we take tea and talk together of inconsequential things.



A Letter To My Love

(Continued from page 12)

your kind enquiry and am very pleased to report that my work is indeed progressing most satisfactorily. I don't know whether it's the Greenwich air, or the view from my friend's house, or a combination of both, but inspiration does seem to be flowing much more freely than usual of late. The house stands up on a hill overlooking the park, the Royal Naval College and the river, and if I were old George it would break my heart to leave it—but he is seriously contemplating selling it and going to live in the States. His wife is American and they already spend quite a lot of time over there, so I suppose it makes sense—but for me, it's England, home and beauty every time. (This is probably an old-fashioned idea, but then most of my ideas are, I'm afraid.) How is life at St. Luke's? Do you like night duty or is it terribly boring? And when do you get back on the day shift? Even if a meeting is taboo, it would be nice to be able to exchange a friendly wave from our respective windows.

Sleep well,
B.J.

P.S. I wonder if it's possible that we have already seen each other? Are you tall and dark, small and blonde, or vice versa?

P.P.S. Joe has been sleeping across my feet every night for the past week. We both know he shouldn't, but the nights are still cold and he is more effective than the average hot-water bottle.

1 Bambury Court.
April 16th

DEAR B.J.,

Many thanks for your letter. I didn't get around to reading it until noon as we'd had a particularly busy night and I fell straight into bed when I got home. Your question about night duty being boring subsequently made me laugh out loud over a solitary lunch. No, I can assure you that life on a men's surgical ward is never, ever boring; and yes, I quite like the night shift once I've got myself properly reoriented. The only snag is that in my case the process is so slow that by the time I'm completely geared to sleeping in the morning and watching children's television programs in the afternoon, I find I'm back on days again! This, in fact, is due to happen a couple of weeks from now—but at least I have a few days off between the changeover, so I'll have time to get used to the idea. My musical friend thrust a magazine under my arm as we wearily parted company at dawn, and I see that the column she has marked with large red crosses is all about you—complete with picture, too! You look more mature than I'd expected—and somehow I'd always imagined you'd be clean shaven. Not that I've anything against moustaches; and my friend says you are the spitting image of Robert Redford. I very much like the sound of your friend's house at Greenwich, and share your sadness that he may feel obliged to emigrate. Like you, I could never pull up my roots for good—and if it's old-fashioned to cry every time people sing *Land of Hope and Glory* at the last night of the Proms, then I'm old-fashioned, too. As a matter of fact, Roger did want to take me to South America with him, but I couldn't bear the thought of staying abroad for two years. He didn't propose until the week before he was due to go, so we didn't even have time to arrange an official celebration. Everything was so hurried, and he's been away for so long that there are times when, if it weren't for this ring on my finger, I might almost forget we're engaged. I expect I'm just being silly and feminine, and I don't think he's at all bothered judging by his letters. That isn't saying much actually, as he is without question the world's worst correspondent. As a matter of interest, I have made two separate counts and find I've had more letters from you in a fortnight than I've had from Roger in eighteen months.

Best wishes,
Marianne

P.S. I am five foot three, and sort of fair to mousy, and if we'd passed each other you probably wouldn't have noticed me.

P.P.S. No wonder Joe has been looking so pleased with himself lately. He must think we're both soft in the head!

3 Bambury Court.
April 17th

DEAR MARIANNE,

I hope the Amazonian policewoman doesn't spot me pushing this through your mailbox at one in the morning as I'm sure she'll insist I'm a burglar, and carry me off—and this she could probably do with one brawny arm. I'll risk it though, as I want this to reach you quickly. I don't know how long it takes to swap letters between here and South America, but if you're really going so far as to tell your fiancé that you've been regularly corresponding with another man, do you think you could also ask his permission to come out with me one day when you finish your present spell of night duty? Apart from wanting very much to meet you, I'd like you to see the house at Greenwich, and as Alida and George are going to back there in two week's time (a final flying visit before they put the place up for sale) they've invited us both for lunch. They're two very nice people, and it would be a very proper occasion, so I don't see how Roger could object. Please let me know what you think.

Yours ever,
Barney

P.S. That was a very old, very bad photograph of me. I shaved that awful droopy moustache off months ago and am much younger and better-looking than that picture suggests.

P.P.S. I must confess that I'm not the least like Robert Redford.

1 Bambury Court.
April 20th

DEAR B.J.,

Many thanks for your letter, and apologies for not having answered it until now. It was awfully nice of you (and your friends) to invite me to lunch, but I honestly don't feel that I should accept. Also, on reflection, I'm not even going to mention you when I write to Roger, because I'm pretty sure he'd get the wrong idea. He once admitted if he has a fault it is that he tends to be rather possessive. I think it all stems from an insecure and unhappy childhood which isn't his fault; and I suppose, looking back, it was because he wanted to make sure of me that he insisted on our getting engaged before he went away. So I'm sure you will understand why it's wiser we don't meet.

Yours regretfully,
Marianne

1 Bambury Court
April 21st 9 a.m.

DEAR B.J.,

I've grown so accustomed to receiving your replies to my letters by return that I bent down to pick up the blue envelope when I came in just now before it dawned on me that it wasn't there. You do know—don't you?—that I wasn't trying to say that I thought we should stop writing to each other. On the contrary, I should very much like to go on—unless, of course, you feel there's no future in it. Perhaps you could let me known by hoisting some kind of signal on your balcony before you go out this afternoon? Like a white handkerchief for 'OK,' or a black tie for 'Let's forget the whole thing'. I hope it's the handkerchief.

Yours sincerely,
Marianne

P.S. Not only no letter to greet me but, so far, no Joe. If you haven't already, will you please send him home?

April 21st, 7 p.m.

DEAR B.J.,

You may wish to note that your unexpected and very hurtful lack of co-operation has contributed in no small way of making this one of the unhappiest days I've ever spent in my life. Even if you couldn't be bothered to communicate a decision as requested, you might have made sure that Joe was safely on his way home before you went off to Greenwich. I assume that you inadvertently left him asleep on your bed and that he has therefore been shut up in your place all day which is distressing enough—but for all I know he might have left you at the usual hour and been diverted on his way back here. I've asked the only neighbors I could locate, but nobody has seen him. Then, as if I hadn't enough on my mind, a letter has arrived from Roger which is very upsetting. From force of habit I was about to explain why, but naturally you won't be interested any more, so I won't bore you with the details. Suffice it to say that if, as I hope, my cat is still in your apartment, I shall appreciate it if you will return him tomorrow without fail. I need him very much.

Yours very sincerely,
Marianne

April 22nd, 10 a.m.

DARLING—

I suppose you know that it is extremely unethical for a staff nurse to address a patient in this manner? Also that if anyone had seen you kissing me at midnight when I was supposed to be taking your temperature, I might have been sacked on the spot? I dimly recall drawing this to your attention, and your saying that if we're getting married would it really matter that much? Oh, darling—(there, I've said it again!)—If you knew how close I came to total cardiac arrest when I reported for duty last night, and the head nurse read out your name from the day's intake list! And when she said you'd been injured early that morning by falling from a tree after rescuing an over-adventurous black cat, and that you'd stubbornly refused to be put into the ambulance until the vet came to examine the wretched animal, I nearly cried. And when she added in her gruff, no-nonsense voice, 'Typical mad Englishman—bless him!', I had to pretend I'd been stricken by an unseasonal attack of hay-fever. Thanks to you, the 'wretched animal' is alive and well and sitting here looking more complacent than he has any right to be. You needn't have worried about not having had time to get the vet's name before you passed out—his was only the second number I tried from the list in the yellow pages, and his office was quite near. He is a very nice man, and was most relieved to learn that it was only your ankle that was broken, as it could, he said, just as easily have been your neck.

You asked me last night how long I had known I loved you, and I said I wasn't sure—but I suppose I was getting intuitive twinges quite early on, and that was really whey I shied away from your first invitation to meet, even though I made Roger the excuse. B.J., you aren't to feel the least bit guilty about Roger, because even before yesterday's letter from him arrived, I'd been having a lot of niggling doubts about him. His admission that he has fallen in love with a local girl took a great load off my mind. How I ever came to get engaged in the first place to a man who doesn't like Mozart or Bach is a complete mystery. Actually, when I wrote to tell him last year that I'd acquired a kitten, and he wrote back to say that he was allergic to cats, I should have realized I'd made a terrible mistake. About you, on the other hand, I am as positive as you sounded last night when you looked up at me, and at the identity badge on my uniform, and said sleepily, 'Hello, Miss M. Pegley. You're even more beautiful than I imagined you would be'.

Dear Love, this letter is going to smuggled in to you by a trustworthy friend when she goes on duty after lunch, I won't be able to talk to you much tonight. I rather think one or two eyebrows were raised last night, as it isn't usual to do half-hourly temperature checks on blissfully smiling patients with nothing more serious than a broken ankle and a few bruises. So, until you're home and I can say it out loud I'll write it instead so that if you start to wonder whether you're dreaming again, you can read this and know that it's true. Yes, I can imagine a future with you in the house on the hill in Greenwich—where the air would be filled with the music of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Johann Sebastian Bach, and Barnabas J. Brown. (Since hearing one of your piano pieces played on the radio yesterday, Mozart and Bach have definitely been relegated to second and third in my list of composers.)

Yours in every possible way,
Marianne

P.S. Joe is now purring so loudly that you'd swear there was a small combustion engine underneath that glossy black cat. One might almost think he knows that he is assured of a cozy place at the foot of a king-size eiderdown every night for the rest of his remaining eight lovely lives!

THE EMERALD

(Continued from page 25)

ing great flaming wounds in the sky so that the ruins of Ellerslie seemed once more to have been put to the enemy torch.

I climbed into the bed that was too big and too lonely for one person and pulled the covers over my head to block out the terrible anger of the thunder.

Great Aunt Fiona had taught me that the women in our family do not cry, but I did. I cried from fear for my beloved husband. I cried from terror of the unknown and the loneliness of being an outcaset among those of my own blood. Somehow I must get Doug away from this terrible place and go back home. I never wanted to leave it again.

At last I fell asleep. I awoke from a nightmare to a feeling of total horror. The storm had ceased. Moonlight cast ghost shadows through the window. I thought I heard Doug calling and I knew he was in terrible danger. Trembling, I fumbled for my long blue robe and slippers and groped my way down the broad stairs.

In the light of a small oil lamp, Mrs. Muir's white-clad figure looked solid and cold as stone. Dr. MacAilen's face seemed almost as drawn as Doug's. "I was about to call you," he said. "Your husband has gone into a coma. He is sinking fast."

I knelt frantically by the bed. "We must do something—get an ambulance! He must go to the hospital!"

The doctor shook his head. "It's no

use. The telephone is out of order. The roads are closed by the storm."

The anger in Mrs. Muir's voice startled me. "Tell the woman the truth. Lady Margaret will not let him escape."

I stood up. "Lady Margaret? You really believe Lady Margaret is taking her revenge against my husband?"

She must be mad. I could not believe. I would not believe. How does one deal with the dead? How does one deal with hate that reached beyond the grave?

The doctor turned away. "I have done everything for your husband medical science is capable of doing. He does not respond."

"Medical science," Mrs. Muir snapped. "Your good wife would have known better than that. There is only one way to save the Campbell."

"Tell me," I begged. "I will do anything.'

"It will take courage," she admitted, "but you have McAilen blood. You must go now alone to the cairn and make your peace with Lady Margaret. And may the Good Lord protect you."

Lightning flashed and once again in its angry blaze I could see through the window the dark terror of the old castle.

Leave Doug alone to go on an insane errand? I had no choice. No matter how fantastic, if there was a single chance to save Doug, I would take it.

I kissed him good-bye for what might be the last time. His breath was coming in harsh gasps. I too felt weak as if the life was slowly being drawn from my own veins.

I who had always been terrified of the dark went out alone into that starless blackness. All night long in the city there is the comforting sound of other human beings. Here there was a silent void. Not a light showed in the glen. I might have been alone on some strange planet.

Heedless of the briers that tore my gown and the rocks that cut through my thin slippers, I groped and clawed my way up toward the ruins.

Exhausted, weak with terror, I fell on my knees by the cairn. I could feel a chill that seemed to slice down my shoulder and rest like an icy hand on my breast.

I had never believed in the supernatural. It is the living, not the dead, who are a threat. The moon, pale as a melted candle, threw tomb shadows on the crumbled walls. The heather below the slope was the color of dried blood. I shivered and was afraid as I have never been afraid in my life. I wanted to run from this cursed place.

I thought of my dying husband.

I threw back my head and tried to stand tall. "Lady Margaret!" I called. "Lady Margaret!"

The echo of my voice mocked me from the ruins. *"Lady Margaret! Lady Margaret!"*

There was no sound, no stirring of the dead twigs, yet all about me, I could feel a terrible presence.

"Lady Margaret—Grandmother," I cried. "I will do whatever you want. Take your revenge against me—not my husband."

The storm had passed, but once again there was a blinding flash of lightning. When I was able to open my eyes, Ellerslie rose about me in all its ancient splendor. Paralyzed, unable to speak or even to move, I was a helpless bystander watching the scene of its destruction.

I saw Alisdair, gray-haired, arrogant, and the fierce pride of young Rory Campbell. The Lady Margaret, wearing the blue gown of the portrait, sang the song that still haunted this glen. *Cold, cold this night is my bed*—As she sang, she looked at Rory Campbell.

I saw the rage on Alisdair's face as he leaped to his feet. There was the harsh metallic clash of weapons. I heard the anguish of Lady Margaret's dying cries. I was a witness as Rory Campbell took from her dead finger the ring that had been a token of his love.

The story was not quite as I had been told.

The scene vanished, and once again I was alone among the desolation of the ruins.

"My poor Lady Margaret," I wept. "No wonder you cannot rest. It was Rory Campbell, not Alisdair, you loved. You deliberately provoked that quarrel. You died, not just for love, but from shame and remorse."

The wind moaning among the fallen towers was my answer.

I was no longer afraid. Now I had a sense of my own power. "You destroyed the two men who loved you. I am your own flesh and blood. I will not let you have what is mine. Let us make a bargain. I will give you back the ring Rory Campbell took as a remembrance of his love."

With my bare hands I gouged a hole in the rainsoaked earth of the grave. I took the emerald from my finger for the last time and pressed it to my lips, remembering my happiness the day Doug gave it to me.

I tore a bit of silk from my nightgown and wrapped the ring to protect its beauty from the earth. Gently I covered it with soil and placed a heavy stone above so the rain could not wash it away.

"Rest, Lady Margaret," I prayed. "Rest. Let peace come to this Glen."

Was it only my imagination or did something gentle and loving brush against my tearstained face?

I do not know how long I knelt in prayer. When I stood up the first golden light of dawn gleamed behind the mountain. The birds began their awakening songs. How beautiful morning was in the glen! Just to be alive was a triumph.

I made my way across the heather. The only trace of last night's terrible storm was the unfriendly sign by the road that had shocked me on our arrival. Lightning must have struck it, for the post was shattered and the metal crumpled on the ground.

When I entered my husband's room, Dr. MacAilen met me with a warm smile and outstretched hands. "He has passed the crisis. A few hours of natural sleep and your husband should be as good as new."

Laughing, crying, I knelt by my Doug's bed. His skin was moist and firm to my touch, his breathing steady and sweet as a child.

His hazel eyes opened. He looked about bewildered and then he smiled, his old warm loving smile. "Christie," he whispered, "Christie, my darling. I've been so far away."

He fell asleep again, holding my dirt-stained, ringless hand.

"Let him rest now," the doctor said. He touched my shoulder. "Get those wet things off, lass, and climb in bed. I'll have the maid bring you up some breakfast. I can't have a kinswoman coming down with pneumonia in my house."

I did what I would never have believed I would dare do. I kissed his cheek.

I was so tired I felt light-headed. All that had happened seemed part of a dream. I could smell scones baking. The telephone rang and I heard Mrs. Muir's voice with its pleasant Scotch burr answering it. I hoped that soon I would have the strength to tell her what happened. Through the open window drifted the sweet scent of heather and the sound of children laughing.

On the landing of the great curved stairs, I turned to look down at the portrait of Lady Margaret. Our eyes met and it seemed to me she smiled.

JASMINE

(Continued from page 15)

pushed her inside, then turned and disappeared with the eunuchs. Jasmine, left without the protection of either her wraps or guards, was suddenly aware of how completely defenseless she was.

This time he was seated on a crimson divan. A huge canopied bed filled the far wall. Jasmine steadied herself as she felt the fear pounding within. He rose to greet her and Jasmine met his eyes with contempt and scorn fueled by fears. The white-robed Arab had a gentle, quiet manner that totally confused her. She knew what he wanted from her and had expected him to take it immediately. He towered over her and had a most majestic bearing that was softened by his gray eyes and calm smile. His beard was full and dark with streaks of red throughout. His head was clean-shaven, as was the custom among Arab males, so it was difficult to gauge his exact age. Jasmine was quite sure that he was in his mid-thirties and fully capable of forcing her to do almost anything. She stole a quick look for his dagger, but it was not in sight.

His eyes captured hers and they sparkled with amusement. "Jasmine? Is this my state visitor from Circassia? I can hardly believe my eyes."

Jasmine studied him carefully, then with all the force of her terror she slapped his face.

"Well. You have a lot to say, don't you?" he ventured, rubbing his cheek.

"Are you the great Sultan the eunuch praised!" Jasmine demanded.

"I am the Sultan of all Oman. People call me Sa'id," he responded.

"Then, oh mighty Sa'id, this is for you." Jasmine slapped the Sultan's other cheek as hard as she could.

"Ah, then Mansa was right about you." Sa'id winced but a smile lingered in his eyes as he rubbed his abused face.

Jasmine flushed with amazement at her own courage.

"Send me back to my home. I am a free woman of Circassia, the high-born daughter of a great ruler," she announced, then lied easily, "and my father shall not rest until he has found me."

The Sultan shook his head sadly. "No, Jasmine. I cannot return you. The men who deal in slaves will slaughter anyone who threatens their trade. I am, for now at least, more powerful than they, but you are not. A captive set free and sent back would cause an uprising among the slaves. The raiders would kill you long before you set sight on your home. And do not think that your father can help; no one can trace the raiders' path."

"But the English have stopped the slave trade," Jasmine insisted.

Sa'id smiled ruefully and shook his head. "The British have tried but even they cannot stop the smugglers and pirates. The British have turned to me for help. Together we have made treaties and fought to stop this foul trade, but even together we are far from effective. You are in another world now, my world, and my people believe our God approves of slavery so long as we care for and do not abuse our slaves."

The Sultan turned from her slowly and walked to his divan. Jasmine peered over to see what he was doing. His hand stretched under the pillows and he pulled out his dagger. Jasmine forced herself not to flinch as he approached. At the last moment he turned the blade around and extended it to her, shaft first.

"Here, take it," he urged Jasmine. "Listen carefully, my beautiful Jasmine, I want you to use this if you need to, but use it carefully. Cut me if you must, but do not kill me. Remember this: I am the Sultan and if you kill me, then you will have killed the only person who can save your life. My murderer would be killed by my faithful followers with no questions asked. You would have no place to run. If you cut me I will bleed. If you cut me badly I will call for aid, but I will say it was my own doing . . . an accident." He put the dagger into Jasmine's hand. "That's right. Hold on tight. Now perhaps you feel a little less helpless and a little more my equal."

Jasmine's hand shook as she sliced through the skin on his arms. Sa'id sucked in his breath and pressed his white sleeve against the wound. He looked at Jasmine in silence, his eyes showing some pain, but with an understanding gaze still on his face.

Jasmine's shaking extended up her hand to her arm. She tried to steady her weapon with a double-handed grip, but the shaking did not stop. At least she would soon know how honorable this man was. She waited to see if he kept his word. In defense she stood with her feet planted firmly on the floor and her arms locked straight ahead, keeping the dagger aimed directly at Sa'id's chest.

The sounds of the rest of the place spilled into the silence of the room. Outside, children were scampering and in the distance creatures could be heard bleating and bellowing, crowing and honking. In the courtyard, women's voices chattered, rising above the low murmur of servants and eunuchs.

Still Sa'id waited.

"What do you want of me?" asked Jasmine in a voice that shook as much as her hands.

"I want all of you, Jasmine." Sa'id's voice was soft but sure.

Jasmine's eyes flashed to the left and right and she quickly backed into a corner, thrusting the dagger before her at full arm's length. She was not going to be taken off guard now. The man was attractive. He had treated her well until this point. He had provided for her needs and he had given her a weapon. He had even proven himself true to his word—thus far. But he was the enemy.

He spoke again, clearly, honestly, and openly. "I want your body. I want your mind. I want your very soul."

"Why?" Jasmine demanded. "Why do you want me? Why did you do this?"

Sa'id turned away and sat down on his divan. He cradled his wounded arm and looked tenderly toward the cornered woman. "Jasmine, I did not steal you away. The raiders who grabbed you were not my men. The Arab who brought you to Oman was not my man. When your boat landed, its cargo was up for bids. Because I am the Sultan, I have the first choice. If Mansa had not singled you out for your fiery spirit you would now be standing with the others while other men examined your virtues more rudely than I. If I am guilty of any offense it is that I have brought you into my harem without allowing anyone else the chance to have that honor."

"Then that is what I am?" the words stuck in her throat. "A part of your harem?"

"Yes."

"And how many other women do you have?"

"I believe there are forty-eight concubines together with my one wife."

"Oh, Mighty Father! Why me? You don't need me!" cried Jasmine.

Sa'id's eyes sparkled and a bemused smile spread across his face. "Ah, Jasmine I do need you. I need to be close to your fire. I am a very powerful man in this part of the world, but I am constantly being tested by others who would seize my throne and bring chaos to our land. The King of England and even noble Napoleon vie for influence here. They want our rich trade with Africa and they wish to destroy all that makes our civilization storng. I have many dreams, Jasmine. I long to bring a permanent peace to our land and to end the abominable slave trade that is responsible for stealing you from your home, but my enemies are desperate men who will do anything to save the profits they make from buying and selling human souls. They come at me from all sides, demanding constant vigilance. I need you to keep my wits sharp and my senses piqued."

Jasmine shifted slightly, her arms tiring of their posture. "Don't any of your other women keep you sharp and alive?"

"You will come to see that my home is very comfortable. I love my women and all my children passionately. I am a very generous man. None of that is conducive to keeping my wits finely honed. Here it is easy to become lax and lose your sensitivity to the unpredictable people beyond our doors. I see that my mother has given you the jewelry I sent."

"Your mother?"

"Yes, the woman who brought you here is my own mother. She approves of you."

"And will I become your wife?"

"In a sense, yes. I can only marry a Moslem. It is one of the obligations that comes with my position. You will be of my harem, and as such will be equal to all my other women, and myself—in this house, at least. You will not be my servant and I will never divorce you. If we cannot survive together I will give you a small palace of your own.

Jasmine shifted again, and slowly slid to the floor. She sat cross-legged with the dagger clenched firmly in her lap. There was too much to consider. There were too many new dimensions to this latest dose of reality. "I have no choice in this?" she asked again.

"I am afraid your past life has ended and you have no choice. Unless you wish to use that dagger on yourself, you are obligated to become a member of my harem," Sa'id said pleasantly, "and I think you would have done that already had that been your desire.

Jasmine bristled. She was not going to let this man have his way with her. She was not going to kill herself, at least not yet. She was definitely going to keep him at bay until she decided what would be best for Jasmine. She began to warm to the battle. Sa'id was an exciting, even an enticing man. The situation deserved more consideration. "You had better think again if you think I am that easily known."

Sa'id chuckled, clearly delighted with her spirit. "No, my beauty, I do not begin to know you, and that is the secret of your hold on me." He slid into a relaxed position on the divan and looked at her affectionately. "You, my dear Jasmine, are like a prize Arabian horse who refuses to be ridden. I have taken some of my women out of pity and others out of political necessity and still others out of genuine love. They give me pride, security and love, and children, lots and lots of childen." Sa'id was beaming. "And I love them all because I do not expect to receive from them more than they can give." He stirred and leaned toward Jasmine's corner, reaching out his uninjured arm toward her. "But, you, my beauty, you bring me a challenge. You are defiant and irresistible. You lash out when I come too close, yet you draw me to you with your fire. That is why I must have you. I flatter myself that I might be the one man you will tolerate as master. I hope that with time and patience you will trust me enough to take me on. I will not take anything from you that you do not want me to take. I am a very patient man, dear Jasmine. I will not try to conquer you; I only want to taste your fire."

Jasmine saw her chance and held on tightly. She rose slowly to her feet. "If what you say is true, then you will let me keep this dagger to use as I want."

"It is yours."

"And you will keep your distance," Jasmine whispered.

"For a time, at least," nodded Sa'id.

"And you will let me go back to my room now," continued Jasmine.

"I will call upon my mother to escort you." Sa'id clapped his hands crisply and a servant appeared. Sa'id spoke in hurried Arabic and the man disappeared.

"I want you to know, my Jasmine, I will prize you always and will love our children deeply."

"If you don't die first," Jasmine threatened, trying to keep the excitement of his challenges from showing.

"That, my beauty, is in Allah's hands as much as in your own," replied Sa'id.

There was a rustle at the door as the woman entered with the black cloak. Sa'id concealed his bloodied sleeve quickly and spoke softly to her. She smiled warmly and turned to Jasmine, approaching slowly, her arms opened wide. Jasmine held the dagger aside to show she meant the woman no harm. The cloak was draped over her and Jasmine carefully tucked the dagger into the folds of her clothes. She pulled the black cloth securely around her, feeling safer and more comfortable. She touched the dagger's keen edge and knew that if she used her wits well she would not have to use the dagger.

"Jasmine, I will see you again soon and I promise to be a very patient man. But remember, I will taste your fire before we are through."

Jasmine caught her breath and let her words escape slowly, "We shall see, O mighty Sultan, we shall see."

Jasmine turned sharply and strode out of the room, followed by the woman and the eunuchs. As she left she touched the veil that masked her face and was grateful for the secrets it kept within.

Editor's Note

In 1808 Britain finally ended centuries of profitable slave trading and began a vigorous fight to stop the practice altogether. His Majesty's Navy ruled the Atlantic Ocean and eventually Britain was able to stop most of the white slave trade through her control of India and influence over Egypt. Marauding pirates and smugglers, however, held free sway in the Indian Ocean. There, they were beyond England's control. Britain needed a strong local ally to enforce her will in that part of the world and found her in Sa'id bin, Sultan of Oman.

The practice of white slavery had always been on a small scale compare to that of the African slave trade. But to women like Jasmine it was terrifyingly real. Most white slaves came via overland routes from Circassia to Egypt or Turkey and were then shipped southward to the harems of Arabia and Oman.

Sa'id bin Sultan was a practical man and a naturally sharp merchant, who in accordance with the customs of the times, was involved in all the trade activities of the area. As Moslems, Sa'id and his fellow Arabs believed that the Islamic religion actually guaranteed their right to own slaves, provided they were treated as family members. Britain's desire to end slavery seemed both two-faced and unjust to the Arab world, which felt the foreign powers alone had abused slaves, and the same foreign powers were now calling for the end of a profitable business.

The ruler of Oman knew the extent of British power and he knew Britain would try to conquer his empire if he did not help bring the slave trade to an end. He chose to help the British despite the disastrous effect it had on his own income. The British did not want to risk a war with Sa'id and they accepted his slow, methodical, effective approach to ending slavery. Ultimately, long-range joint treaties along with Sa'id's own vigorous efforts eliminated both smuggling and the slave trade.

Sa'id bin Sultan became the emperor of Oman in 1806 at fifteen. After years of struggle to secure his throne, he had expanded his empire southward to the great ivory and slave markets of East Africa. He died in 1856 leaving behind a harem that included one Arabian wife and seventy-five concubines.

A Memory of Summer

A CAMEO NOVEL

(Continued from page 21)

one scratch and the palm was also liberally covered with moss and dirt from the tree. Blood oozed sickeningly from one of the deeper scratches.

"You'd better come up to the house and have it fixed," Matt said.

"No!" Kate gasped, her voice sounding like a frightened yelp. She took a step backward, almost as though he might attempt to drag her to the house forcibly. "I'll go home and see to it."

"Don't be ridiculous." His voice was frigid and distinctly polite, and he spoke in the manner of a man used to people jumping when he gave an order. Kate wondered whether anyone ever dared to argue or disagree with him and realized that she hadn't the energy to put up more than this token resistance. Besides, her hand *was* hurting like the devil, and no doubt it did need immediate attention. When Matt went on to say that the children could come too and they all looked delighted, Kate hadn't the heart to deny them the chance of having a look inside the Rectory. At least there could be no awkward moments between them with the Marsh children there. So obediently she followed on as Matt led the way; the children gathered eagerly round him, firing questions at him. Had he seen any ghosts yet? Had he moved into the Rectory for good? Did he have any children of his own? To these questions, answered with great good humor and patience, he replied, no, yes, and yes, he had a son of almost seven. At that final "yes," Kate remembered that she ought to be hating him, or at least acting in a polite and aloof manner. But Matt had just rescued her from falling fifteen feet out of a tree, and he was treating her with cool, impersonal detachment. Kate still wasn't sure that he recognized her. If he had it was appalling that he had taken her presence so calmly. After all, she had had prior warning of his coming and should have been prepared for such a meeting, whereas he couldn't have possibly known she was living at Lynton Cross. When Kate had left him, looking fit to murder her, at Weymouth Station, he couldn't have guessed their paths would cross again.

Eventually they reached the Old Rectory. Matt led the way through a sort of scullery into a kitchen, a dream of a place, high-ceilinged and spacious with a flagged floor washed spotlessly clean. A comfortable-looking woman of about fifty was in the process of unpacking a tea chest filled with glassware; she looked up as they entered, blue eyes smiling at the children but widening with distress as she saw Kate's hand.

"Mrs. Pearce, this is Miss Grey. She teaches at the local school and has had a run-in with a cat. Mrs. Pearce is my housekeeper," Matt explained to Kate. "Is the first-aid stuff unpacked?"

"It was in the first chest I dealt with, which is just as well. Mercy me, that looks nasty," Mrs. Pearce frowned.

Kate was busy figuring out how Matt knew she taught at the local school. She was fairly sure the children hadn't mentioned it. "Shouldn't you go to the hospital?" Mrs. Pearce asked, interrupting these puzzling thoughts. "I've always been wary about animal bites."

"I had a tetanus shot a couple of months ago," Kate reassured her.

"Oh, well, that's all right then. Still, it needs seeing to. Come over to the sink, dear."

"I'll fix it," Matt said, much to Kate's dismay. He turned on the hot water tap and filled a basin with warm water into which he tipped some strong-smelling disinfectant. As he was otherwise occupied, Kate felt reasonably safe in risking a good look at him. He had changed little over the last seven years except that he had, rather unexpectedly, grown a mustache. It entirely suited him but, of course, he was the sort of man that anything would suit, even a full beard. The mustache bestowed upon him a dashing, rather pirate-like look. Kate could imagine him dressed in seventeenth-century clothing, a cavalier in satins and velvets, with lace at his throat and wrists, knee-high leather boots, a sword at his side and diamonds adorning his fingers. He had the right sort of figure, too. The faded denims and open-neck shirt he wore did nothing to disguise the width of his shoulders, the narrowness of his waist and hips. His thick, dark blond hair was much longer than it once had been, well over his collar at the back, but from what Kate remembered of him, this was due to a general lack of interest in his appearance rather than a definite attempt to look modern and "with it." Despite his most obvious eligibility, he had never been vain.

At that moment he looked around, turning his head so quickly that he caught the full force of her interrogative gaze. Behind his light blue eyes amusement glinted and Kate knew then, with absolute certainty, that he had known all the time who she was and was deriving considerable satisfaction from putting her in this difficult and embarrassing position. She *was* embarrassed, but angry, too, and she met his gaze steadily without blushing as she might once have done.

"Come here" he said. Kate obeyed, holding out her right hand to him. Matt took it by the wrist and plunged it into the warm water. The wounds stung a little but not too much, and the water turned pink as Matt washed them with cotton wool. Kate stared at the water and tried not to think about his tall form so close to her that she could feel its warmth against her bare arm. His hands were surprisingly gentle.

"All right?" he inquired. "Does it hurt much?"

"No, it's fine, thank you."

Matt dried her hand carefully and examined it, turning it over and feeling each finger with quite unnecessary care. By then Kate was one mass of nerves, remembering not the bad time when they had parted, but the good times before. She stared pointedly, not at his face, but right in front of her, to the place where his shirt was unbuttoned, revealing a triangle of deeply tanned skin. Despite his light hair and eyes he tanned very easily and Kate remembered a few occasions when they had swum together, and how his body had been tanned a deep golden brown. At this particular memory she panicked suddenly and would have drawn away, but his hand tightened on her wrist, and she felt the strength in his fingers. Their eyes met, and for a brief moment, it was as though Kate was seventeen again and still so helplessly in love with him that she would willingly have died for him. She even forgot the cruelty, the deceit, the heartache that came between then and now.

"Hey, look!" Ian Marsh's sudden yell pulled Matt and Kate away from each other. Her Siamese adversary sat in the kitchen doorway calmly cleaning one delicate paw with the nonchalance only a cat can achieve. As she stared at it, it raised its eyes to her and blinked them sleepily as though to prove there were no hard feelings.

"That's Sasha," Mrs. Pearce informed us. She looked at Kate's hand. "Oh, dear. Did he do that?"

Kate nodded. "I'm afraid it was all a wasted effort then," Matt said, "if you were trying to rescue him. He has a delight in climbing trees, the higher the better."

Kate gulped down her cup of tea. It was time she got herself out of this house; she just couldn't pretend any longer. It was ridiculous to play this game of polite strangers with a man she had once known so intimately. She remembered everything, every look, kiss, and caress exchanged.

"Thank you for the first-aid and the tea," she said briskly and formally. "I'm sure you have a lot of unpacking to do so we won't impose on you any longer. Come on, children."

They obeyed reluctantly. This had been an exciting adventure and they were in no hurry to end it.

"Wait a minute, Ka . . . Miss Grey," Matt said, cutting off the use of her first name before anyone but Kate could notice it. "I wonder if I might have a word with you . . . alone."

Not likely, Kate thought. *I'm not having any words alone with you.* Possibly these thoughts showed for he went on, "I'd like you to meet Andrew."

"Andrew?" Kate repeated questioningly, "Your son?" He nodded and looked bewildered at her tone of voice, which reflected her disapproval.

"All right," she agreed reluctantly. "Perhaps the children could come too?"

"Yes, fair enough." He had been quite tense, but now it seemed that his whole body relaxed and the stiffness drained out of him. His mouth, below the soft, sweeping mustache, turned up into a derisive, faintly mocking smile as he murmured, "Safety in numbers, my sweet Kate?"

She could have kicked him. He used to quote *The Taming of the Shrew* at her, calling her "bonny Kate" and "my sweet Kate" and even, when she was in a temper, which was quite frequently in those days, "Kate the Curst." He only did it to annoy her, knowing she would end up yelling at him and even hitting out at him so that he would grab her wrists and pull her into his arms, kissing her until the temper vanished. Kate read in his eyes that he too was remembering this, but the look she cast him was stony. At twenty-four she was grown up enough not to be drawn in that easily.

Kate and the children followed Matt down the cavernous halls of the Old Rectory. "Andrew is probably in here," Matt said, opening the door of a huge room, thankfully cheerful and light, with tall, leaded windows overlooking the front lawns. It was a long, rectangular room that reminded Kate of something out of a Jane Austen novel, so large that the ladies are able to stroll up and down taking their genteel exercise during inclement weather. As yet the room was unfurnished save for a baby grand piano shrouded in a dust sheet and a rather nice green velvet and mahogany sofa. The small boy, who had been sitting upon this sofa reading a very hefty-looking volume bound in red leather, got to his feet as everyone trooped in.

He was extraordinarily like Matt, having the same dark blond hair and clear blue eyes, and not for one moment could anyone doubt his parentage. Of course, Kate reflected, Peter also had the same look; he had once mentioned that all the McKinley males were very alike even to second and third cousins. Andrew was tall for his age and rather pale. His hair was cropped short and brushed flat, a much more old-fashioned cut than Matt's, and he wore what may have been a school uniform; short grey trousers, grey V-neck pullover, a white shirt, and a blue and grey striped tie. When Matt introduced him to Kate, he greeted her in a polite, flat little voice completely devoid of expression. He looked as thought he never got dirty, never climbed trees, got into fights, rolled in the grass in his best clothes, never, in fact, did any of the hundred other annoying things that six-year-old boys usually do. He said, in the same frigidly polite voice that Kate now recognized as having something of a transatlantic accent, "Mrs. Pearce tells me Sasha hurt you. I am so sorry."

Kate swallowed hard and blinked. "It doesn't matter, Andrew," she managed to reply, summoning up a bright smile. "I expect it was my own fault." She chose that moment to glance at the Marsh children and could have laughed out loud at their expressions of open-mouthed astonishment. She said their names and Andrew nodded to each one in turn; he didn't quite offer to shake hands, but it looked like a near thing.

While the children were summing one another up, Kate stole a glance at Matt. He too was watching his son with a similar bemused wonder to match her own. She sensed great love there and momentarily warmed to him because there was also concern and worry. His deep voice was taut with anxiety when he spoke.

"Andrew, why don't you take the children to see your pony? I'm sure they'd like to look around outside."

"Yes. Very well . . . Father." Kate knew she hadn't imagined that brief but definite hesitation before he said the last word, almost as though he was unused to saying it. He obediently led the Marshes out. Young Ian, in no way deterred by Andrew's lukewarm manners, yelled excitedly, "Have you really got a pony? Gosh, I wish I did!"

The door closed on them and suddenly Matt and Kate were left alone. They glanced quickly at each other and then away again, and Matt's smile was brief and rueful as he walked away from her, going over to the piano and taking off the dust cover. He gave this simple task his full concentration almost as though he were embarrassed by Andrew's peculiar behavior.

After a long, awkward pause he asked, "Did you find Andrew a little . . . strange?"

"I wouldn't stay strange. Rather old-fashioned."

He looked up from the piano and sighed rather heavily. "He's had rather an . . . unorthodox life."

"Oh?" Kate was interested but determined not to show it. She dared not let herself get involved with him or his problems. He was part of her past, and for her own peace of mind she had to let him remain there in the past. At the coolness of her tone Matt looked up sharply from the piano and stared fixedly at her, eventually letting his gaze drop to her feet and back again to her face. It was impossible to tell what his verdict was, but Kate doubted if it was very favorable. In her old jeans and shirt she looked and felt scruffy and juvenile.

"You sound as though you don't give a damn," he said coldly. "I'd have thought someone in your profession would be interested in why a child should turn out to be a stilted, rather unlovable little automaton as Andrew is."

His words shocked a stinging retort out of Kate. "How can you say such a thing?" she gasped. "About your own son!"

"Andrew is not—" He cut the words off and seemed to hesitate although his eyes were fixed firmly on her, and she could only wriggle uncomfortably at their unwavering scrutiny. He went on, in a very deliberate voice. "I say it because it's true. Andrew has had very little experience of what you might call a normal home life. Most of his life he's been handed around from relative to relative, looked after mostly by nannies and such. Since he was five he has been at a boarding school in the States. I suppose that partly explains this rather self-defensive attitude he has."

"I don't doubt it," Kate said crisply and even accusingly. "I don't approve of boarding schools for children of any age . . . but for a five-year-old! That's downright inhuman. Where is his mother?"

"She's dead," Matt replied flatly. "She

died three years ago. She was an invalid from Andrew's birth and totally unable to care for him herself."

Whoever Andrew's mother had been, obviously Matt had taken her death hard. Perhaps that explained the change in him (for he seemed much more serious and down-to-earth than he had seven years earlier). The women he loved had died. All his money and good looks could not keep her alive.

"I'm sorry," Kate said bleakly and discovered that she really was.

"Are you?" he questioned, unpleasantly and without belief.

"Of course I am! I'm sorry for her and for Andrew. I'm even sorry for—"

"Don't say it, Kate!" he interrupted pre-emptorily. She remembered that Matt was altogether too proud a man to allow anyone to feel pity for him, checked her momentary sympathy, and attempted to bluff her way out of the situation.

"Don't say what?"

"You know very well. I always was able to read your thoughts, Kate."

If he had intended dispelling her pity utterly and finally, he had certainly succeeded. For his voice had dropped to little more than a whisper, a purring, silken tone so intimate that it seemed to crawl all over her, the voice he used for making love. Kate started for the door.

"I must go. Perhaps you'd make sure the children don't stay too long. Their mother will probably wonder where they've gone. Thank you for seeing to me hand." She wrenched open the door.

"Before you go, what is the name of your headmistress?"

Kate blinked in surprise. "What?"

"Your headmistress," he repeated patiently. "She does have a name, I presume."

"Of course. It's Miss Ashton." She waited for enlightenment but he said nothing more so she went out still mystified. The housekeeper gave Kate a friendly smile and accompanied her to the back door.

"You saw young Andrew, did you, miss?" Mrs. Pearce asked Kate. When Kate nodded, she added enigmatically, "Poor lad. Still, it's a blessing things turned out as they did."

"I thought he seemed rather quiet," Kate said, always the diplomat.

"So he would be. He's been all his life pushed from pillar to post among his mother's relatives, you know. Rich Americans they are. Very rich, very standoffish sort of people. Good-intentioned, I don't doubt, but not very friendly. No love came the boy's way that I could see. That is, till Mr. McKinley went to fetch him away home. He'll be all right now."

She sounded confident of this, as though being under Matt's care was the panacea for all ills. Of course her words went nowhere near explaining the situation to Kate's satisfaction. If Andrew's mother died three years ago, why hadn't Matt continued to look after his son? Kate wondered whether perhaps Matt and his wife had been living apart or were even divorced so that when she died her family had immediately taken over the custody of the child. It would explain why Andrew had obviously felt some reluctance about calling Matt "Father." But, though Kate was curious about these unanswered questions, she could hardly ask Mrs. Pearce for the answers. So she said farewell and headed home. Val had spent the afternoon in the pottery and hadn't even noticed Kate's absence.

That day was followed by the usual claustrophobic Sunday at the Nicolsons' farm. It was no wonder Kate looked forward to a normal Monday at school. However, such respite was not to be hers. Ian Marsh insisted on recounting to the whole class every detail of the Rectory incident, and Kate was unable to cover up her hand, now very colorfully bruised and still scratched and torn enough to draw cries of interest, sympathy, and, she suspected, ghoulish delight from the children. Ian did nothing but go on about Matt, Andrew, and Andrew's pony all day, even forgetting himself enough to write seven lines of news about it in his diary, accompanied by a neat picture of Kate being lifted out of the oak tree by Matt. As his work usually consisted of a hastily written few words and a scribble for a picture, Kate could do nothing but praise his industry and award him a much-coveted gold star.

At three-thirty, after the children had said prayers and gone home, one of the juniors came into Kate's classroom and asked her if she would go along to the office before going home. she rapped on the office door and opened it in reply to Miss Ashton's call. there, sitting calmly in the two comfortable armchairs, were Miss Ashton and . . . Matt McKinley. He sprang to his feet as Kate entered. In the small room he looked even larger than usual.

"Oh, Kate, this is Mr. McKinley," Miss Ashton said formally. "Mr. McKinley had just moved into the Old Rectory. This is Miss Grey, the lower school teacher."

Before Kate had time to speak, Matt said, quite calmly, "Miss Grey and I have met, actually. How's the hand?" he asked, treating Kate to a smile that made her heart behave as it hadn't done in years.

"Fine, thank you." Miss Ashton looked vastly intrigued by this short interchange. Kate didn't doubt that she would question her about it the moment they were alone.

"Mr. McKinley has a six-year-old son named Andrew," she went on and turned to Matt with a sunny, friendly smile. "I presume you would like him to start immediately."

"If that would be convenient—"

"You want him to come *here?*" Kate interrupted incredulously.

It sounded very rude and was not at all the way a teacher should address a prospective parent, so not unsurprisingly they both stared at Kate, Miss Ashton looking horrified. Kate felt herself blush and avoided the amusement in Matt's eyes as she apologized. "I was simply under the impression that you would send Andrew to a private school," she explained to his tie.

"I might have, had the local school been different," he said. "I don't thing he would cope well in a large school with big classes. But this seems ideal, a small school where he can get to know the local children. He needs friends his own age—ordinary, nice kids without any hang-ups. He was in a boarding school for a while, and before this he had a series of tutors and governesses. Not very satisfactory but considerd quite unexceptional in the social class to which his mother's family belong." Matt shrugged slightly, thus dismissing his in-laws as being rather eccentric and of little importance. "He has become rather reserved and even a little . . . odd, but I hope to change that. In fact, he has already encountered the Marsh children, a very lively bunch, and they seem to have taken him under their wing."

"Oh, goodness!" Miss Ashton laughed. "In that case, I'm sure there will be no problem."

A smile in answer to hers flickered briefly over Matt's rather stern mouth. It was a firm, well-shaped mouth that could soften into a most attractive smile or tighten ominously in anger. Kate had only seen it angry once and still shivered a little in remembrance. He had seemed a very benign, easy-going character once, but this was only when he was getting his own way. If crossed or thwarted . . . well, Kate hadn't imagined the look of murder in his eyes when he stood watching her train draw out of Weymouth Station.

"Perhaps you would give me a few particulars about Andrew," Miss Ashton said, unaware of the tension in the room. Kate decided that this was the time to escape and got to her feet. Matt, who was sitting on the upright chair by the desk, stood up as well, the movement lazy and curiously elegant and graceful for so big a man.

"Is there anything else, Miss Ashton? I have a few things to do in the classroom before I go home."

"No, dear, there's nothing else. Oh—one thing. It might be a good idea if you call in at the Rectory tomorrow to fetch Andrew, as it is on your way to school." She glanced at Matt. "Just for the first morning, you understand. When Andrew knows more children he will be quite happy to come on his own."

Kate didn't care much for the idea of entering the Rectory a second time but nodded and said she would pick Andrew up at a quarter to nine. She left the room hurriedly.

In the classroom once more she breathed a sigh of relief and swiftly got on with the job of backing paintings with large sheets of heavy paper and stapling the finished articles to the walls, each with its owner's name upon it. With ability born of much practice, Kate climbed up on a stool perched on one of the desks, some paintings under her arm, the staple gun in her right hand. When the door opened she was too engrossed to turn around immediately. A staple gun is rather heavy and unwieldy, not by any means the easiest tool to use with only one free hand, and it took a good deal of strength and effort. When she did glance around and saw Matt watching her, she gasped and dropped the remaining paintings. He walked across the room, picking them up off the floor and handed them back to her, saying, "Why is it whenever I see you you're doing something dangerous?" Are you set on breaking your neck?"

Kate climbed down. "Did you want something, Mr. McKinley?" she asked coldly and formally.

"Yes, *Miss* Grey,' he replied. "I wondered if you would like a lift. I gather we live at the same end of the village."

"True, but no thank you. It's a short walk and I haven't finished here yet."

"I could wait," he suggested, regarding her flushed face and disheveled appearance with considerable amusement. Kate put up her left hand to push back a strand of hair and his eyes followed the movement. Then, in the briefest possible moment, his eyes widened in what seemed to be surprise and consternation. The look was over and gone in a second, and Kate realized he had seen her engagement ring. Their eyes met and she felt a distinct shock on seeing the ugly expression in his.

"Who's the lucky man?" he asked unpleasantly. "Anyone I know?"

"I shouldn't think so," she replied. uncertainly, rather put out by the inexplicable way he was behaving. Why, after all, should he care to whom she was engaged? Without knowing why she did it, Kate shoved her left hand in her pocket and out of reach of his angry, glittering gaze.

"You don't want a lift then?" he demanded abruptly.

"No, thank you."

After a moment he walked away toward the door. There he halted. Kate had the ridiculous and almost overriding notion that if she went over to him he would take her in his arms, and it would all be just as before—or better, because she was older and more capable of dealing with adult emotions. Or was she? If she went to him, would she be the same stupid, lovesick girl who would have done anything—anything—just to be part of his life? Kate tightened her hands into fists, stricken with dismay at such thoughts and also with a distinct sense of misery because of what had gone and could never be recovered. But then Matt shrugged again and went out. Kate let out her breath in an audible gasp, relaxing her fingers and noticing the marks on her palms where her fingernails had dug in.

She was admitted into the Rectory by Mrs. Pearce who presented Andrew to her clean, scrubbed, and wearing the same clothes he had been wearing on Saturday. He looked very neat and smart but Lynton Cross Primary had no school uniform, and Kate hoped he wouldn't appear too strange to the other children. She recognized that it was important for him to be accepted at once, but luckily the Marshes had adopted him, deciding that as they were first to see him, he was their property.

As they left the Rectory, they pass Matt's Cadillac parked in the drive and Kate said, more or less for something to say to break the ice with this strange, reticent child, "Your father has a lovely car."

"Yes," he agreed, quite seriously, and then added, "I never knew my father, you know, until a few months ago."

Kate didn't know what to say in reply to this surprising statement. Did this comment mean that Matt hadn't been in evidence at *all* until a short time ago? That after leaving his wife to have their child on her own (and she couldn't help recalling that he might have been with her at Weymouth during that time) and even to *die* alone, he had then appeared to claim his rights as a father and whisk Andrew back to England? It sounded very unsavory, the portrait of a man with neither sensitivity nor human feelings and was enough to increase the dislike she already felt for Matt McKinley. At least it would have been enough had she believed it. Somehow it didn't quite ring true though; she couldn't believe such terrible things about him and wished it were possible for her to ask him the truth of the matter. But of course she couldn't, not without revealing that she still felt some kind of interest in him.

That first day with Andrew as a member of the class was quite a revelation. Those expensive tutors had obviously not done a very thorough job. He read fluently and it seemed to Kate that whatever knowledge he had, he had gained by reading. He had acquired an astonishing variety of facts. Unfortunately the rest of Andrew's education had been woefully neglected. He had never painted a picture, played with clay or sand or water; while the other children got on happily with practical math, Andrew watched with a puzzled crease between his blue eyes. Centimeters, kilograms, and liters were a complete mystery to him, but that was probably due to his American upbringing.

Unlike many modern educators, Miss Ashton believed that all children should be give a proper grounding in math. "Everyone needs to know their multiplication tables and no child will ever leave my school without knowing them."

"Andrew simply has no notion of arithmetic," Kate told her, "although being intelligent he can do addition and subtraction merely by logic."

"Perhaps you ought to have a word with his father" Miss Ashton suggested. "At any rate, I'll teach him how to do math in a hurry. He turns seven in August and he'll enter my class in the fall."

August! Kate thought with a sharp pain. So Andrew *was* born while Matt was in Weymouth. She felt unhappy and ashamed.

Miss Ashton wrote a note to Matt McKinley asking him to visit the school and discuss his boy's lack of a balanced education. On Thursday evening Matt went in to see her. Kate left the building at three-thirty that afternoon because she had a date with John, and so didn't see Matt at all. But Friday morning Miss Ashton informed her that Matt hadn't been at all surprised to hear about the gaps in Andrew's education. "He said he has confidence that you will be able to sort things out." Kate wasn't sure how to take this confidence in her ability and blushed slightly. Miss Ashton continued, "He suggested that Andrew might stay with you another term—until Christmas. But I don't think that would be a good idea as it would single him out again. Anyway, I told him we would see how things go and review the situation in July."

Kate nodded her agreement. She did

occasionally keep children in her class longer if the headmistress felt another year with lower school group might benefit a particular child, but to keep back a bright boy like Andrew might prove disastrous.

"By the way," Miss Ashton went on, "something rather pleasant resulted from my interview with Mr. McKinley. Did you know the Rectory has a swimming pool?"

Kate shook her head.

"Well, it has," Miss Ashton went on. "Anyway, Mr. McKinley has kindly offered us the use of it two afternoons a week during the summer term. We will need to have a trained lifeguard on duty, but that should be no problem. You have a life-saving certificate, don't you, Kate?"

"Yes." It wasn't easy to understand why Matt should be so generous as to hand over his pool for two afternoons a week. He certainly was making his presence felt. Kate had hoped to keep out of his way as much as possible, but with Andrew in her class and now this swimming pool thing, she could hardly avoid meeting him.

Miss Ashton began to get back to work, but added as an afterthought, "Please go up to see him about the pool at lunchtime. I would like to know what changing facilities there are as well as how safe the pool will be for nonswimmers."

Kate was horrified and started to protest, but Miss Ashton had already left the room.

Mrs. Pearce told her that Matt was actually in the pool at that moment and she walked with her around the back of the house where she indicated a short flight of steps leading to a gate in a high wooden fence which enclosed the pool. It was a warm day, ideal for swimming, and as Kate approached she heard the sounds of water being splashed and a female voice shouted something and laughed ringingly. Kate hesitated, reluctant to burst in on whatever was going on on the other side of the gate. But she couldn't just stand there all day so she summoned up a bit of courage and pushed open the gate. the pool, a conventional rectangular shape, was lovely, but Kate's eyes were drawn immediately to the luscious form of Alicia Allardyce reclining on the springboard in a skimpy white bikini. She was looking down into the water toward Matt who was floating on his back just out of reach of her outstretched hand. Kate squirmed at the thought of interrupting this patently intimate scene and had half turned to go when Matt's secretary saw her. Her eyebrows rose imperiously and she demanded in a loud voice, guaranteed to put anyone firmly in their place, "Did you want something?"

Matt turned then and looked in Kate's direction, treading water a moment before swimming across the pool with an easy, powerful breaststroke. He hauled himself out of the pool, the muscles of his arms and chest rhythmic beneath suntanned skin. The water streamed off him as he walked, completely without self-consciousness, toward her. He ran the fingers of one hand through his thick, blond hair that was made darker by the water and nodded a casual greeting.

"I came to see the pool," Kate stuttered, overwhelmed by the sheer animal magnetism that emanated from him. He was attractive enough fully clothed but like this . . . he knew how Kate was feeling, too. She could sense the knowledge of it in his eyes as the mockery that she had learned to hate and fear flickered into them. He picked up a towel that was draped over one of the lounges that were scattered about poolside but made no attempt to cover that disturbingly male body. Kate kept her eyes fixed firmly on his face. She hated him for the effect he had on her. Nervously Kate rubbed her arm with her left hand, and his eyes seemed to linger upon her engagement ring. The mockery in them faded and once again they seemed to harden a little, and a small amount of self-confidence flowed back into her. At least he must realize she wasn't pining after him, that there were other men in the world.

"Do you think the pool will be safe for the children?" Kate asked in a practical voice. "Only two of them can swim."

"I suggested to Miss Ashton that we rope off the shallow end." He looked at her sharply and a smile touched his mouth. "What's the matter, Kate? You look distrustful. Don't you believe that my motives in allowing the children to use my pool are purely altruistic?"

"Is that what they are?"

"What else?"

"I don't know. It just seems odd that anyone should want thirty-odd children in their pool."

"Ah, but you see, I'm a very generous fellow."

At this point they were joined by Alicia who had evidently got fed up with being out of the limelight. She put on a transparent pink jacket over her bikini and strolled with catlike grace in their direction. This was the closest Kate had been to her and she was forced to admit that Alicia was stunningly beautiful with a lovely face and a matchless figure. Her copper-colored hair was held back from her face with a green chiffon scarf. Obviously she had no intention of getting scarf or bikini wet. She stood close to Matt, not quite touching him, and blinked sleepy blue eyes at Kate.

"This is Miss Grey, Alicia," Matt drawled. "The local schoolteacher." He contrived to make the profession sound at once staid and old-fashioned, but also somehow disreputable so that Kate longed to be able to snap something cutting back at him. But words and their manipulation were Matt's life and it was useless trying to out-talk him. So she contented herself with smiling sweetly at the girl by his side.

"How awful. How can you bear to spend your days with all those horrible, grubby kids around you . . . I keep telling Matt he should never let Andrew mix with them, but he has ideas of his own." She looked at Matt through thick, darkened lashes, but he seemed immune to their appeal and merely grinned at this piece of appalling snobbery that had made Kate squirm.

"Those horrible, grubby kids will be sharing the pool before long," he reminded her.

"Yes, I'm perfectly aware of that nonsense. I'm sure I won't go near the pool when that happens."

"Well . . . maybe you'll get more work done then," Matt said. "Which is, after all, what you're paid for."

She flushed and looked disconcerted. Presumably Matt didn't often remind her that she was actually only his secretary. Kate was amused. Alicia looked furious and said, spitefully, "You're engaged to John Nicolson, aren't you? I met him a couple of nights ago—rather dishy, really, in a countrified, muscle-bound sort of way. But I imagine that sort would appeal to a certain type of woman. When are you getting married?"

This time, instead of going red, Kate went dead white—an unsavory mixture of anger and outrage.

"John and I haven't decided yet," she said quietly. "But I expect it will be in the autumn."

All this time Matt had been standing very still, his eyes fixed on Kate's face. He had draped the towel around his neck and now, suddenly, he rested one hand on Alicia's smoothly rounded forearm, running his fingers lightly up and down her arm. Seeing this, Kate felt a momentary sense of loss, almost of desolation, a feeling that faded as quickly as it had come. If Matt was having an affair with his secretary, well, it was his life and nothing to do with her. Obviously Alicia was a man-eater of the worst kind, the sort that most men willingly come back to for more. Not that Kate could see Matt being chewed up by Alicia or any other woman. He was far too self-sufficient and would always be the master in any relationship.

When Kate left, having got all the information Miss Ashton required about the pool and the changing facilities, Alicia had gone back to recline once more upon the springboard and Matt had dived into the water. As Kate closed the gate behind her, she turned around and watched him surface immediately below Alicia, reaching up and catching hold of the springboard. Kate realized she was shaking. *Damn the man*, she thought wretchedly. *Damn him for coming back into my life.* Damn him for making her realize in one short moment that she could never, never marry John because she just did not care enough.

Over the next couple of weeks, Andrew McKinley continued to settle in well, proving the adaptability of children by rapidly shedding the self-defensive, rather unnerving veneer and becoming a normal, healthy, noisy, though extremely intelligent, little boy. Only occasionally did he revert to that rather pathetic child he had been when Kate first met him. Once, during news time, one of the children mentioned that it was her mother's birthday, a comment that soon escalated into a lively discussion about their respective mothers. The sudden change in Andrew's appearance was both shocking and upsetting. White-faced, he sat staring at the floor, seeming somehow to grow smaller as he withdrew into himself. Kate swiftly changed the subject.

It is very important for a teacher to have some knowledge of a child's background, Kate told herself, and she decided to ask Miss Ashton about Andrew's mother.

"Mr. McKinley didn't say a lot about his wife," Miss Ashton said. "She had been ill for some time and during the last days of her illness she clung very possessively to Andrew, so that he was with her almost to her death. She had cancer, you know. I'm surprised Mr. McKinley did nothing about the situation, but I have a feeling that he wasn't living with his wife at the time and knew nothing about it. An odd situation."

With this Kate had to be content and things actually improved with Andrew. Though he occasionally daydreamed, she was sure that he was no longer unhappy or under stress. Which was more, she often thought ruefully, than could be said for his schoolteacher.

Since that day at the pool, Kate had known that she must break off her engagement to John yet dreaded the complications that were bound to follow such an action. Since the time Alicia had mentioned Kate's involvement with John, Matt had made no comment upon it, but more than once when in his company (on the afternoons the children went to swim) Kate had been aware of his eyes dwelling almost broodingly on her ring. It was possible that he would connect her sudden change of heart with his appearance in Lynton Cross. The thought of the triumph that this would afford him was daunting, and Kate knew she would have to convince him that she was completely indifferent to his charms. As the very sight of him was enough to set her heart racing uncomfortably, this was unlikely to be the easiest task in the world, but for her own peace of mind, she had to do it.

On Tuesday, Kate received a phone call from Major Billington, the chairman of the Village Hall Committee, who told her there would be a meeting at the hall that evening. John was also a member of the committee, and she thought that after the meeting, when he took her home, would be an ideal opportunity to suggest to him that they break off the engagement. She felt reasonably certain that, though he might be annoyed, he wouldn't be upset. His attitude the previous Sunday, when she lunched as usual at the farm, had been offhand and distant.

By the time Kate showed up, there were already a few people waiting for the meeting to start. Matt McKinley nodded to her from across the room. She turned away. What was *he* doing here, anyway?

Apparently he had been invited. Certainly Major Billington behaved in a friendly way, saying, as he shook hands with Matt, "How d'you do, McKinley? Very decent of you to turn up like this, especially as you are what you might call a stranger in these parts. You know Miss Rockwell, I believe."

Janice Rockwell was the daughter of one of the three rectors who presided over St. Luke's and seven other parishes, and anyone less like a rector's daughter it would be difficult to find. She was one of those ultra-feminine women guaranteed to set up the backs of every member of her own sex and bring out strong protective instincts in all red-blooded males. Her air of silly helplessness had always irritated Kate, for she knew how determined and tough Janice could be. Now, as she saw the dazzling smile Matt threw at her, Kate could cheerfully have strangled her. She wondered if Janice could become competition to Alicia Allardyce but doubted it. Matt would soon become irritated with her placatory manner and empty-headed conversational style.

RENDEZVOUS

By Maggie Boyajian

My smile was returned
Our eyes had a rendezvous
I would never forget.
My heart engaged in a concert
I would attend forever.

Turning gladly away from the picture the two of them presented, Kate smiled at John who had come in with Janice and the Major. He had made it obvious that he had no wish to be introduced to Matt but walked over to Kate, kissing her with gentle fondness and accompanying the action with a warm hug. Aware that Matt was looking at them, Kate was more than usually responsive in returning the embrace. John looked surprised; so much so that Kate began to wonder how cool her responses usually were.

John kept his arm firmly and possessively around Kate as he and Matt greeted each other with curt nods, hostility quite open between them. They were of a height, though John was more heavily built than Matt and moved with none of the lithe grace that characterized Matt's every move. A slow smile of faint derision curled Matt's mouth and John flushed angrily. Uncertainly Kate began to introduce them, only to be interrupted by John.

"We've already met," he said shortly, his voice hard and gritty. Kate looked up in astonishment at him. What did he have against Matt? The answer was soon forthcoming. When the remaining members of the committee came in and Janice, clutching Matt's arm in a possessive way, took him off to meet them all, Kate noticed again the fiery look kindling in John's eyes.

"What's *he* doing here?" he muttered.

"The Major invited him. Do you know Ma . . . Mr. McKinley?"

"Oh, yes, I know him. Did you know that we used to run our horses up in High Paddock? The land belongs to the Rectory, but my family has always used it. It's ideal for horses—well-drained, plenty of shelter, good strong fences. Why, my great-grandfather ran his horses up there. But now Mr. High-and-Mighty McKinley turned up last night, cool as you please, and demanded we take our horses off."

"I see. Isn't there—well—some kind of written agreement, a lease or something?"

"No. It's always been what you might call a gentleman's agreement, but clearly McKinley is no gentleman. Look at him now, crawling all over poor Janice. She looks embarrassed. Men like that, just because he's rolling in money and I suppose you could say he's good-looking, think they can get away with murder. It makes me sick!"

This tirade sounded to Kate surprisingly like jealousy, and she couldn't help listening to it with dismay and astonishment. He was not only hot under the collar but completely unreasonable. No one in their right minds could accuse Matt of "crawling" over anyone. He had no need to, especially now with Janice clutching his arm and gazing at him with a fawnlike devotion that he was completely ignoring as he talked to the Major. As for High Paddock, Kate supposed that Matt had the right to use his land as he saw fit. He had paid enough for it.

"I suppose you can put the horses somewhere else," Kate suggested. "I mean, maybe he wants the land for something. His son has a pony, you know, so perhaps he—"

"I might have known!" John snapped, snatching his arm from Kate's shoulders. He looked like a sulky, bad-tempered schoolboy and she could scarcely believe the evidence of her own senses. "I suppose you're as much under his spell as all the other stupid women in this town. Even my own mother and sisters seem to think he's the cat's whiskers, and you're no different!"

"I don't think that!" Kate denied vehemently. "If you must know, I think he's arrogant and conceited, but everyone has the right to use their own land as they see fit." She looked uneasily at him, aware that things were going drastically wrong between them. "Oh, John, let's not argue over him. He just isn't worth it."

At this moment Major Billington called the meeting to order. "Ladies and gentlemen, I have a special announcement. Mr. McKinley, a newcomer in our town, has very kindly offered us the use of his barn for the barn dance. On other occasions we have held that dance in here, but obviously a real barn would be ideal."

"It needs clearing out and cleaning," Matt put in, "but I'll see to that."

"Good. Good. Very kind of you. And Mr. McKinley has also suggested we use the Rectory pool for some form of sponsored swim, perhaps among the teenagers."

Kate took no part in the resulting discussion, but John made a fool of himself by opposing the idea as being too mercenary. He was shouted down on all sides and subsided angrily and rather sulkily, so that Kate was torn between feeling sorry for him and being embarrassed by his churlishness. Suddenly she realized that Major Billington was talking to her.

"Kate, dear, you always arrange the barn dance, don't you? I suggest that you get together with Mr. McKinley sometime, to look over the barn and so on."

Before she could do more than stare in bemused wonder at the thought of "getting together" with Matt, Janice said in her sweetest voice, "It's such a difficult business and poor Kate has done it for the last two years. Just for once, I would be quite willing to take the load off her shoulders."

I bet you would! Kate thought to herself, biting back a sudden howl of slightly hysterical laughter. Then John growled, "I don't see why Kate should do all the dirty work!"

This brought her into the limelight, and she discovered that everyone there had turned to look at her. The other committee members looked thoroughly disapproving, as though she had said she didn't want to do the work. No one seemed to realize that Janice had only put herself forward so that she could have an excuse for seeing more of the barn's owner. There was a great deal of glaring going on—everyone was glaring at Kate except John who glowered at Matt. Matt just sat there, a self-satisfied smirk on his face, his arms crossed over his chest so that the muscles of his upper arms were taut against the denim shirt he wore.

At last the Major said, with great diplomacy, "that is a kind offer, Janice, my dear, but, you know, I rely on you to organize the garden party—no one else could do it so splendidly and we could not expect you to organize both events. No, I think that, if Kate is agreeable, we should stick to the same arrangements as for the last two years. Kate, you have no objection, have you?"

"Of course not," she lied.

It was settled. The meeting broke up soon afterward. Kate decided it would be too tricky to tell John the engagement was off at such a heated moment. So she kissed him goodnight, told him to stop sulking, and began the short walk home. He stayed at the meeting, still glowering.

Kate walked slowly up the road in the direction of the cottage. It was past nine, already quite dark. Because of the absence of streetlights, it could get very dark, especially in the winter months, and Kate had often been terrified in her first months in Lynton Cross. After three years, however, she was used to it, able to indentify the squares of light that appeared in the windows of the various cottages. She walked down the middle of the road, but when the area about her was suddenly swept with an arc of light from a car's headlights, she neatly stepped aside on to the grass shoulder. The car, a long powerful thing with an engine like the growl of a tiger, pulled up beside her and Matt said, "Get in. I'll give you a lift home."

"No, thank you."

"Don't be an idiot," he said crisply. "I don't intend dragging you off to the woods and raping you. Get in and I'll take you home. You shouldn't be walking about alone at this time of night."

Because Kate was tempted far more than she should have been and had no intention of giving way to that temptation, she spoke more sharply than she might otherwise have done. "I said no, thank you. I don't want to go anywhere with you!" She walked quickly on, hearing him swear angrily. The next moment the car swept past her, turning into the Rectory drive up ahead.

Alarmed and shaken by the brief incident, Kate hurried on with her head down. What was he up to? She shook her head in astonishment. At the entrance to the Rectory a figure detached itself from the shadows and she stopped walking, a sickening sense of inevitability sweeping over her as she waited for him to reach her.

"Look," Kate said quietly, trying to be reasonable and patient, hoping that by keeping calm, she might put him in a similar frame of mind, "I don't know what you're up to but this is ridiculous. I only live just along there, and I'm not likely to come to any danger between here and there."

"I should imagine, sweet Kate, that the only danger you face is from me . . . and yourself, of course."

"Wh . . . what do you mean?" she whispered, infuriated at the trembling in her voice. "You said—"

"What? That I wouldn't drag you off and rape you? Of course I wouldn't. But then there's no need for anything so drastic, is there, Kate? I only ever had to touch you to render you completely helpless."

Anger spurted through Kate at the smug self-satisfaction behind these words, anger that thankfully fought and drove out the inertia that had come before. What he said was true, but that didn't make it any easier to hear. "My God, you've got a nerve, Matt McKinley. Who the hell do you think you are anyway? If you want such an easy conquest, I suggest you try Janice!"

"She would be a little too easy," he drawled, lazily and suggestively. "I like a little fight in my women."

"I would remind you that I'm engaged."

He let out a disbelieving snort. “You wear a diamond ring on your left hand and that’s supposed to make you the property of that weak-kneed idiot back there. Can you imagine being tied to someone like that, Kate? Imagine having to submit to his lukewarm embraces for years and years. God, it would drive you mad. Since when were you content with second best? Even when you were seventeen—”

“Don’t!” Kate interrupted sharply. “I’m not seventeen! I’ve learned a lot since then, Matt. I’ve learned that there is more to love than being swept off your feet. John is a good man, good and kind.”

“Kind?” he scoffed. “Is that what you want—kindness? And was I never kind to you, Kate?”

“I doubt very much if you know the meaning of the word.”

With a swift, powerful movement, he caught at both her wrists with one hand, which left the other hand free to go to Kate’s face. She attempted to turn away, and his fingers hurt her chin as he forced her to look at him.

“Stop struggling,” he ordered, his voice low and vibrant. “For God’s sake Kate, let that armor of yours slip for a few minutes!”

“Why can’t you leave me alone!” she cried, the blood pounding in her ears. She wanted desperately to escape from him but at the same time her senses were clamoring with delight at finding herself so close to him. He released her chin, digging his fingers in her hair in that old familiar gesture, pressing himself harder and closer to her.

“You still feel good, Kate,” he murmured, his voice husky. “You’ve filled out a bit—but in all the right places, of course.” Matt’s lips brushed her hair and then her forehead, moving with agonizing slowness down her face. With an extreme effort she twisted her mouth from his, then let out a sharp yell of pain as his fingers tightened in her hair, bringing her mouth back in line with his.

“God, Kate, will you stop fighting me!” he groaned in an almost desperate way. His mouth fastened hungrily and fiercely on hers. For a moment Kate stiffened with a final effort to keep herself from him, but the effort was too much. It was like coming home—glorious sensations of desire and joy and sweetness flowed through and over her so that a little moan was wrenched from her. Kate forgot the heartache Matt had caused her, the long years when she thought that, despite being so young, she was finished with love and happiness. She clung round his neck, returning his kisses eagerly, kiss for kiss, grasping with delight as his lips found her shoulders, neck, ears, and finally her mouth again.

Suddenly a vision of Andrew flashed through Kate’s mind. Andrew! How could she let this man embrace her, kiss her, this man who had hurt her so badly, had taken her innocent young feelings in his cruel hands and crushed them to nothing, and all this time while somewhere another woman was carrying his child!

Matt caught this sudden shift of mood. “What’s the matter now, for heaven’s sake?”

“Don’t you know?” Kate gasped. “It’s bad enough having you living so near, but to have your unwanted presence thrust upon me whenever I look around . . . haven’t you done enough damage? Oh, how I hate you!”

“You didn’t seem to hate me a few seconds ago.”

“You think you’re so blasted clever, don’t you? All right, so you kiss rather well and I quite enjoyed it. So what? Am I supposed to grovel at your feet for more?”

He laughed. “No, you’re welcome to more without doing anything so drastic as groveling. Stop this nonsense and come here. We’ve got a lot of wasted time to make up.”

“You lay one finger on me, Matt McKinley, and I’ll scream at the top of my voice, I might have been a fool a moment ago, but everyone is entitled to one moment of weakness. But after the way, you’ve behaved, I could never forgive you!”

“What the hell are you talking about?” The words sounded raw and it became obvious to Kate that he was no longer amused but possibly as angry as she was.

“You know what I’m talking about,” she cried, and the cry changed to a faint gasp of pain as he gripped her wrists with hard fingers.

“Suppose you remind me,” he muttered.

“Andrew! Andrew, your son, remember? He’s almost seven, isn’t he? He was born when you were with me at Weymouth . . . I have to spell it out for you? Tell me something, Matt. While you were turning on the charm to the gullible little idiot I was then, where was your wife?”

There was a silence. It was obvious that Kate had touched a raw spot. Then Matt said, quite levelly, “I wasn’t married when I was in Weymouth with you.”

Far from appeasing her, this information made Kate feel worse. “That doesn’t make it any better. You decided to do the right thing by her later, I suppose. Big of you, I’m sure. I wouldn’t have credited you with such nice feelings.”

“You little bitch,” he hissed, coming so close that she felt his breath on her face and saw a flash of gritted teeth. “You can scream your head off for all I care!”

Before Kate could even guess what was coming, it had already come. He pulled her back against him and proceeded, with the cold-blooded fury of the male animal, to thoroughly humiliate her. It was nigh on impossible to believe that this was the same man who had, not minutes before, kissed her with passion, yes, but also with sweetness and gentleness. She couldn’t move as his lips closed on hers; his mouth was hard, lacking compassion or tenderness. He punished her coldly and relentlessly; his arms, like iron bands around her, added to the punishment in their very hardness. Kate’s early struggles proved futile, and it was only when she ceased to struggle because she was too tired and hurt to fight any more that he stopped, pushing her away from him but retaining both hands on her arms as she swayed and might have fallen.

“And now,” he said remorselessly, “I’ll have an apology.”

Kate was too shaken to do more than whisper, in a scarcely audible, appalled croak, “An apology? What for?”

“For jumping to conclusions. For misjudging me.”

“I didn’t misjudge you. You’re everything I said—worse than I thought!”

“Steady now, Kate. Don’t say anything you’ll regret. I may decide you haven’t been punished enough. First you assume I was an unfaithful husband and now you say I was an unfaithful lover.”

“Are you saying you were neither? How dare you say it with Andrew as evidence?”

Kate jerked away from him but not before his fingers had made contact and he felt the wetness on her cheeks.

“You’re crying, Kate.”

“You hurt me.”

“Did I?” He sighed. “Suppose I were to tell you that Andrew is not my son.”

Kate was disappointed. It seemed so

unlikely, so lame . . . cowardly almost. And somehow, while crediting him with many bad things, she would not have named cowardice as one of them. She even felt scornful and it showed in her voice.

"Do you expect me to believe that? You only have to look at Andrew to see he's your son! And . . . and anyway, nothing can excuse the way you behaved seven years ago."

She tore past him and ran toward her cottage. Matt made no effort to stop her beyond calling her name after her once or twice. Only when she reached her home did Kate realize she was standing there howling like a baby.

"Don't you think," Val said, "that it's about time you told me about it?" Hours had passed but Kate was still very upset. "I know it's none of my business," Val continued, "but you can't deny that there's something drastically wrong with your life. You used to be so calm, Kate. Nothing seemed to ruffle your composure or get you uptight. But over the last few weeks you've become so jumpy and nervous. You don't even sleep well, do you?"

"No," Kate agreed, rather sharply.

"Forget it," Val said quickly. "Like I said—"

"Wait!" Kate called her back. "If you don't mind listening, I'd like to tell you. You see, I've had this certain opinion of someone for years. The knowledge that he was no good . . . it sort of helped, made what happened between us less painful. And now—now I know even worse things about him . . . only all of a sudden it doesn't help at all."

"Matt McKinley?"

"Yes. I . . . what I told you before slightly misleading. I gave you the impression that it was Peter I care about. It wasn't, of course. Peter was a nice boy. When I met him I was seventeen and he about twenty. I'd been ill and went to Weymouth to stay with my mother's sister, Aunt Beatrice. She had no time to bother about me. She gave me a key and told me I wasn't to disturb her or her housekeeper if I came in late. My parents would have had fits if they'd known the freedom I had.

"Anyway, I'd been there a couple of days when I met Peter who was on holiday with some school friends. He was gorgeous, like a Greek god, tall and golden-haired. I could tell he was from a wealthy family because he drove an Italian sports car and always had plenty to spend. We spent every day and evening together. "It was astonishingly innocent, even idyllic, and at the end of the fortnight we were talking of marriage. Not that year, but sometime in the not-too-distant future. I was due to go to Training College the following year but Peter said I wouldn't need to work. Only then did I begin to realize how well off his family was. Matt's father—that is, Peter's grandfather—was something to do with shipping and left a fortune to be shared between his two surviving sons. Which is, I suppose, why Matt can afford the Rectory."

"And where does he come into it?" Valerie asked when Kate fell silent.

"Oh . . . Peter was called home because his father, who lived in Scotland, had had a heart attack. I missed him terribly, but then, only a couple of days later, Matt appeared at my aunt's house and introduced himself to me as Peter's uncle. He explained that Peter had mentioned me to him and he thought as he was down there on business, he would look me up. He knew nobody else in Weymouth, he said, and asked if I would have dinner with him at his hotel that night. My first thought was that at least I would be able to talk about Peter." Kate smiled wryly. "I don't think Peter's name was even mentioned."

Kate had quickly discovered that going out with Matt McKinley, thirty years old, obviously experienced of life and women, was a very different matter from going out with Peter. Matt turned on the charm with such force that she was dazzled by it and far too naive then to realize what was happening to her. In no time Kate was seeing him every day. When she was with Matt she could think of nothing but him; when they were apart he was still the one person on her mind. Much later she realized with pain how clever he had been in the way he handled her. His first kisses had been gentle and sweet, unutterably tender; he had known that anything more passionate would frighten her. But gradually the quality of his kisses changed and his embraces grew more forceful and more demanding. Soon it seemed the most natural thing in the world to be held tightly in his arms, trembling and compliant and aching with longing for him. To give him his due, he never spoke a word of love, but Kate was so much in love with him that she convinced herself that his whispered endearments meant that he returned her love. And he never pushed his attentions too far. It was always he who drew back where Kate might well have begged him to make love to her, to possess her utterly.

"So, what went wrong?" Val asked, sipping her drink.

"I was due to go home at the end of August, and he said he would come to see me as soon as possible. And then, out of the blue, Peter returned. He came to call at my aunt's and when I opened the door, he put his arms around me. I suppose I withdrew instinctively because by then I wanted to be close to no other man than Matt McKinley. And Peter just stared at me, absolutely thunderstruck and gasped in a choked sort of voice, "My God, he really did do it!" I didn't know what he meant then, of course, but I soon found out.

With dawning horror Kate listened as Peter explained, his young voice bitter and hate-filled. "My blasted uncle! I saw him before I went to Scotland—I even gave him your address. I told him we were going to get married and he said we were too young, that seventeen-year-old girls don't know their own minds and that you would go off me as soon as a better catch came along. My God, he's a cynical devil. He's had too many women, too easily, for his own good." He had stopped talking and looked narrowly at Kate's shaken, pale face. "And you really did go off me as soon as a better catch came along. Only he's not such a good catch after all, is he, Kate, because I really would have married you."

"I don't understand what you mean, Peter," Kate whispered at last, licking dry lips.

"Don't you? I believed you loved me—I thought even he wouldn't turn you from me. I said we would get married and there was nothing he could do about it. His last words to me were 'We'll see about that. Maybe I can persuade her to fall in love with me. After all, at the moment I must seem a better catch than you.' "

Even after seven years Kate could still feel the sense of loss and desolation that swept through her. She couldn't help but believe Peter. Even though her bemused, bedazzled mind had often wondered why Matt should spend his time with a rather gauche seventeen-year-old who had thrown herself at him with such abandon who had even—God help her!—told him time and time again how much she loved him. Peter made her sit down and hold his hand, explaining that when he turned twenty-one, in three months, he would come into a very large sum of money left to him by his mother. His father was a semi-invalid and it had fallen upon Matt, his father's only remaining brother, to act as unofficial guardian, ensuring that Peter kept well clear of fortune-hunters and also had enough sense and education knocked into him to enable him to handle the fortune when it came into his hands. And Matt believed she was just one more gold-digger and acted accordingly.

When Peter left, Kate at last gave way to tears. She cried through the night, hating and loving the man who had taken her innocence and naïveté and awakened her so that now she knew all about passion and desire. Those emotions could never lie dormant within her again.

The following morning, the morning Kate was due to go home and Matt was coming to drive her to the station, she rose a very different girl indeed from the one who had gone to bed. Pale, shadow-eyed, her mouth set a bit to prevent it from drooping, Kate packed her suitcase, received her aunt's vague kiss and went to meet Matt who was waiting in the car. It had been a Jaguar then, long, sleek, and silver-grey.

Somehow she survived the short car journey and walked with him to the station platform. The train was already in and before she climbed aboard, Matt drew her into his arms and kissed her gently on the lips. She managed to behave normally; it was, as usual, wonderful to be in his arms even though she also experienced the primitive urge to slap a hand across his lying mouth and tell him how much she hated and despised him. Instead she stood close to him and knew suddenly how to get her revenge and also salvage her pride. She put her arms round his neck and kissed him in return. She had to stand on tiptoe to do this for he was well over six feet and she a mere five-feet-four-inches.

"Don't miss me too much," he said softly. "I'll come and see you before the week is out—you and your parents."

"Oh . . . don't bother," Kate said casually, withdrawing from his arms.

"What?"

"Oh, Matt, don't spoil it," she pleaded, deliberately widening her eyes. "I mean, don't go getting all serious with me. These holiday romances ought to be left to die a natural death, don't you think? Imagine what an idiot I would look if you turned up on my doorstep. You are rather old for me, after all. All my boyfriends are much closer my own age. It's been terrific, of course, and great fun going for meals at all the best hotels and restaurants, and I've loved being driven around by you in that fabulous car. It certainly filled the gap Peter's left. But we weren't being serious, we we?"

It was a performance, a performance worthy of an Academy Award. And during it his expression turned from puzzlement to disbelief and finally to cold, bleak fury.

"He looked as though he would have liked to murder me," Kate confessed to Val. "But luckily for me the train was about to leave and I was able to jump on and make my escape. I leaned out of the window and waved to him as the train got up speed. He just stood there staring at me and was still like that when I last saw him."

"What about Peter?" Val asked. "Ever see him again?"

"No. I had finished with the McKinleys for good."

Val lit a cigarette. "It's quite a story. Though I'm not quite sure why you're confused. I presume you've spent all these years hating him. I would also presume that he must have been hating you in much the same way."

"Hating me? Why?"

"He doesn't know that Peter told you what he was really up to. As far as he's concerned, you were deceiving him, stringing him along, just for the free ride, for what you could get out of him. You say he looked angry when he saw you off at the station."

"Angry? He was furious. I don't suppose any girl had ever thrown him over like that before. But you're right, Val. That aspect of the case just never occurred to me before. So when I accused him of behaving badly seven years ago he would assume I was thinking just of Andrew's mother."

"Was he married at the time then?"

"Tonight he said not. He must have married her later because she had had their child. He was carrying on with me at the same time as that poor woman was somewhere expecting their baby. He said tonight that Andrew isn't his son but that's ridiculous. why would he marry Andrew's mother if he had nothing to do with the child? And anyway, you have only to look at the two of them . . ."

Kate was tired; she didn't want to talk anymore. Val, ever tactful, got the message and went off to bed. But Kay stayed up, replaying the events of the evening. Somehow it had helped, relating it all, making the events of that summer seem different, rather like a well-remembered, well-loved film. She had never tried to forget Matt completely; it was as though he was so much a part of her that she could not cast his memory aside without losing a special part of herself.

She smiled faintly and was still smiling as she drifted off to sleep.

The weather, that had been hot and sticky for days, broke with a really spectacular thunderstorm that lasted an entire night. In the morning, though the storm had cleared the air, it had also changed the weather completely. It was cooler, and a stiff breeze made taking the children swimming at the Rectory out of the question. Kate was glad of this; her feelings toward Matt were altogether too raw, and she felt the only solution to her problem was to keep away from him. Still she hadn't broken off her engagement to John. In a cowardly and, she thought, despicable way, she clung to her diamond ring as though it were armor. As long as she wore it she could convince herself—as well as everyone else—that she was still heart-whole.

With the village festival only two weeks away, Kate knew she couldn't put off going to see the barn any longer. Reluctantly, she phoned the Rectory to inquire when she could go and look around. Alicia Allardyce answered, her voice cool and distant. Having explained she had to see the place where the dance would be held, Kate burned with fury as, without bothering to cover the mouthpiece, Alicia said, "It's that schoolteacher. She wants to know if she can look at the barn."

Matt's voice was low and indistinct in the background; he said something about "Friday evening" and then Alicia spoke, to Kate this time. "You may call on Friday at six, Miss . . . er . . . Grey." She sounded as though she were conferring a great honor and with gritted teeth Kate muttered a brief "Thank you" and just resisted slamming down the receiver.

On Friday Kate duly presented herself at the Rectory. She had put on one of her nicest dresses, sleeveless with a green and white striped bodice and a white pleated skirt, and if, also, she had taken more than usual care with her make-up, well, she could convince herself it was because she was meeting John afterward.

Mrs. Pearce showed her into a room that she realized was a sort of library-study. As with most rooms in the old house, it had walls of old, mellowed paneling; the floor was of much polished wood parquet scattered about with Chinese rugs that probably cost a fortune. The books that lined the walls looked as though they had been read and often. There was no sign of Matt, but Alicia was typing very efficiently at one of the two desks. She wore a very slinky-looking cream silk pants suit, not very secretarial but extremely effective for all that and raised one carefully penciled brow in Kate's direction.

"Oh, lord," she said in a bored voice. "I had forgotten you were coming. I'm terribly busy. Can you come back later?"

"No," Kate said firmly, refusing to be intimidated just because Alicia was beautiful and elegant. "I'm sorry but I have a date at seven. I must see the barn tonight as I need to arrange for its decoration, and the band will want to know what to expect."

"Oh, very well. I suppose I'll have to show you. Come this way."

Kate followed her out of the front door and round the back of the house. The two women said nothing to each other until Kate asked, a little diffidently, "Is Mr. McKinley here?"

"Of course. But naturally he doesn't want to be bothered showing you the barn. He has far more important things to do," she replied, certainly putting Kate very firmly in her place. Kate made a face to Alicia's back and reflected that if Matt was having, or even thinking of having, an affair with her, he was getting all he deserved. Unfortunately this reflection in no way helped her to view the idea with equanimity.

The barn, which was some way from the house, was empty, having already been cleared out for the dance. As Kate walked around, taking a rough estimate of the building's size, she reflected that Matt had at least spoken the truth about this. The place was ideal. There was room for a stage to be erected at one end—there was a portable block stage in the hall that could be transferred—and she guessed that two or three hundred people could comfortably dance here. The floor was concrete, which would be hard on the feet, but no one would mind that.

"There is another smaller barn over there," Alicia said, lighting a cigarette and tapping one foot impatiently as Kate walked slowly around. "Mr. McKinley mentioned that you would need someplace for a bar."

"Oh, yes, that'll be perfect," Kate told her. "We have applied for a license."

Alicia eyed her narrowly, and Kate could almost feel the atmosphere change. "I believe you and Mr. McKinley knew each other years ago," she said.

The remark sounded casual enough but Kate felt immediately on her guard. There was no doubt that she had stiffened as she spoke and was watching her closely as though attempting to assess her reaction.

"Yes," Kate agreed, unwilling to enlighten her further.

"I suppose you must have been just a kid," she went on. "there's something about Matt that sets these young girls panting with lust for him. I should think it must have been rather embarrassing meeting him again after all these years, after throwing yourself at him all that time ago."

Kate couldn't hide her dismay at the thought of Matt telling Alicia all this. Had they laughed about it, about the silly girl who had flung herself at him? She felt sick with a mixture of nerves, unhappiness, and straight, plain anger. Alicia laughed, a soft, unpleasant little sound that tightened Kate's already taut emotions.

"Don't look so upset, sweetie. It was obvious to me that you knew him, so I asked him and he told me all about Weymouth, about how you used to go swimming together—you in that *very* brief yellow and black bikini."

Very carefully, because she didn't want to reveal her true feelings in her voice, Kate said, "Well, it was a long time ago, Miss Allardyce, and I suppose we all do silly things when we're young and luckily there was no permanent damage. Now, I think I've seen enough so I need not take up any more of your time." Kate smiled sweetly but inside she was seething with fury. How dare he! To discuss and probably laugh about her with this creature. Even down to such details as that bikini! She remembered how embarrassed she was the first time she wore it. Matt had teased her and laughed at her and in the end made her feel almost comfortable about wearing it. Kate turned and walked blindly from the barn only to pause, blinking in the strong light, staring at the very man she had been thinking about, who was now walking towards her. He was wearing a suit of dark blue alpaca and looked very suave and businesslike as well as extremely attractive. He smiled at her.

"Oh, Kate, I'm sorry I wasn't here to show you around. Got held up in a traffic jam. Have you seen everything you need to see?"

"Yes, thank you," she replied stiffly and in a strangled voice, so that it was no wonder that he looked puzzled. "Miss Allardyce has been most helpful and . . . informative," she continued, and this time he studied Alicia's rather annoyed expression before returning to gaze at Kate. He said, very slowly, almost as though he were unsure of himself, "Could I have a few words with you before you go? Alicia, do you mind? This is rather private."

Kate felt no particular triumph at seeing the beautiful Alicia dismissed so precipitously mainly because she was so apprehensive of finding herself alone with him in the big, empty barn. With the purpose of making an escape possible, she went right outside and only turned to face him when she was out in the open, standing on the beaten earth in front of the building.

"I can't imagine what you have to say to me," she said and his mouth turned up in a slightly ironic smile.

"Can't you? I think we have some unfinished business. It's time that I do some explaining and you do some listening."

"I'm not sure that I—"

"No!" he said firmly and rather curtly. "You *will* listen, Kate, because I'm sick to death of this nonsense. I told you Andrew isn't my son and you didn't believe me. This isn't a thing I want generally known, though only for Andrew's sake, but I know you'll keep it to yourself. So I'll tell you again. Andrew is *not* my son."

"Whose son is he then?" Kate asked a trifle sullenly.

"My brother's."

She stared at him in frank disbelief. It was too trite to be true. "Your brother's?" she gasped at last. "Oh, really, Matt, give me credit for some sense. Do you honestly expect me to believe that you married your brother's—what? Mistress? Ex-wife? And then took on her child?"

"Is that so odd?"

"No, not odd for some people, but for you? You told me once you disliked —what were the words? Used goods. Rather crude but distinctly believable."

"Damn you!" he snarled, losing his temper with alarming rapidity. "I'll make you listen even if I have to tie you up!"

"Brute strength again?" Kate asked with a lightness she was far from feeling. He took a slow step toward her and she moved back, panic rising in her. She felt like a hunted animal, scared stiff, and her eyes widened with terror. He stopped then and sighed. "Goddamn you, Kate!" he said angrily and turned on his heels, stalking away from her, his fury showing in every step.

Then Kate turned away herself and walked slowly toward the gate, aware that her shoulders sagged and she felt very tired. It seemed that Matt and she were doomed to continue tearing each other to pieces and there was nothing, no subject or common ground, where they could seek a compromise. She should have listened to his explanation; Kate knew at once that she was being completely unreasonable. But she felt too vulnerable, too easily taken in, too willing to believe anything he might say, any story he might invent. The only way for her was to keep her distance.

Remembering that John had said he would pick her up outside the Rectory at seven, Kate hastened her footsteps a little. His car, a station wagon that had seen better days, was parked a little way down the road, and John was standing beside it. But it was not at him that she immediately looked, for he was talking to Alicia Allardyce. Her feet faltered to a halt as she wondered how to deal with this unforeseen complication. John had not so far seen her. In fact, Kate doubted if he would have noticed her if she had done a Highland jig in the middle of the road. He was gazing at Alicia in a moonstruck manner that Kate found both irritating and embarrassing.

"Oh, dear," a drawling voice murmured softly, close to Kate's left ear. "Has the lovelorn swain strayed from the straight and narrow?"

It seemed almost inevitable that Matt should have to witness Kate's discomfiture. She felt the color wash hotly over her face and was furious that Matt should see it, especially since she realized at once that what she felt was chagrin, not jealousy. Her pride was suffering badly.

"I suppose none of these agricultural types have ever seen a woman like Alicia," he went on, his voice soft and digging cruelly and inexorably into her brain. He had got over his temper and sounded smug and complacent.

"Probably not," Kate agreed casually. "She is beautiful."

"Quite delicious in fact," he added.

Kate glanced quickly round at him. He was looking at Alicia and John, but she could have sworn he had been watching her a moment earlier. "Not jealous, I hope," she suggested sweetly and he smiled scornfully.

"Of him? Hardly likely. If I snapped my fingers she would come running. They always do."

"Really? I wouldn't know about that."

He gave a soft laugh. "No, I don't suppose you would."

As he spoke he took her hand very firmly in his and led Kate forward toward the couple by the car. Alicia noticed them first and turned away from John to stare icily at her. Then John, following her gaze, stared stonily at their linked hands. Kate tried without avail to pull away, but Matt's fingers tightened on her own, hurting them.

When they reached the car, Matt lifted Kate's hand and made a sort of "handing over" gesture to John. "Delivered safe and sound," he said in his most insolent, mocking manner. "You should keep a better eye on your women, Nicolson, and . . ."—his eyes flickered to Alicia's face—"keep them off other people's." He raised Kate's hand to his mouth. Seeing his intention, she tried to jerk away but failed to do so before his lips had brushed against it. "Have a nice evening, darling," he murmured. "Be good, won't you? Don't do anything I wouldn't do."

Who the hell does he think he is?" John snapped when they were driving away. "He's got a bloody nerve, holding your hand and kissing it like some soppy Casanova type. I should have given him a sock on the jaw."

"Oh, forget it, John," Kate returned wearily. "It doesn't mean anything. He was just being funny."

"It's not my idea of being funny—calling you darling. Alicia tells me you knew McKinley years ago and that you and he were very 'close,' whatever that means. I think you should have told me . . ."

As he ranted on and on, hardly pausing for breath during the whole fifteen miles to Dorchester Kate tried to cut out the nagging voice. By then her head was thumping steadily and painfully, and she reflected ruefully that for somebody always considered quite placid, she was getting far too many attacks of nerves lately. The last thing she wanted to do was sit through a film, which was their intention. But when she tried, tentatively, to suggest they go elsewhere, John said it was a film he particularly wanted to see, so to keep the peace Kate went. It seemed to her, as she sat in the darkness of the cinema watching without seeing the epic being enacted before her, that she had never known John at all. Was it jealousy of Matt that was bringing out this petulant, unreasonable side to his character? And if so, why exactly was he jealous? For all his ravings, Kate didn't think he was jealous of any affection she might feel for Matt. In fact, it seemed more likely that he was envious of Matt for what he was, for his looks, his wealth, his talent, his ability to attract women like Alicia yet at the same time be generally popular with members of his own sex. Kate could only be thankful that she had discovered this side of John before they were married.

Later she invited him into the cottage for coffee. Val tactfully withdrew, leaving the two of them alone. After making the coffee, Kate slowly drew the engagement ring off her finger and placed it beside the coffee pot. John stared at it, then at her.

"I'm sorry, John," she murmured inadequately. "But don't you see? It's no good. We just aren't suited. I thought we were and we always got on well, but just lately things have been going so very wrong. I've started to realize that I'm not the kind of wife for you. I'm sure I wouldn't make a farmer's wife."

For a second or two she thought he was going to take it well. In fact, Kate was positive she saw something like relief flash through his eyes. But he became thoughtful, picking up the ring and turning it over and over in his hands before finally shoving it into the top pocket of his suit jacket. He stared at her, his eyes hooded and unreadable and then said, with an unmistakable sneer of bitterness. "Another little triumph for Matt McKinley."

"What?" Kate stared in bewilderment at him.

"Oh, cut out the innocent act, Kate. You took one look at him and decided I just wasn't good enough for you. Don't think I haven't seen the way things have been going. You only started changing toward me since he appeared."

This was, of course, partially true, and Kate acknowledged it to herself and to him. "But it's also true that you've changed too, since he and Alicia moved here. You never looked at me the way you were looking at her this evening. Don't you see, John, that we couldn't make a marriage out of such a lukewarm relationship." He looked unconvinced and Kate babbled on a bit longer. "I'm sorry, John. Really I am. I didn't want this to happen, believe me."

"Forget it," he snapped, heading for the door. "As far as I'm concerned it's good riddance to bad rubbish. But don't think you'll stand a chance with McKinley as long as Alicia is around. What man in his right mind would look at you when he has a girl like that?"

Kate nearly retaliated by saying what girl would look at him when there was a man like Matt around, but a slinging match would hardly have helped either of them, and she knew his words were prompted by bitterness and anger. Nevertheless, after the reverberations from the slamming door had died away, she shed a few solitary, lonely tears for what had, after all, been a good relationship until Matt and Alicia had arrived on the scene.

And this, of course, made Kate more angry than ever with Matt. For now it seemed that he had twice very successfully ruined her chances for happiness.

Miss Ashton had a surprise for Kate at school the next day. As the two women walked together down the corridor, Miss Ashton mentioned a meeting she had had the day before. "Mr. McKinley is very pleased with the way Andrew has come along. He thinks very highly of you, Kate, and is happy about your treatment of his adopted son."

Kate supposed later that she must have looked astonished, or at least very skeptical. Miss Ashton must have noticed this, for she reproved her, albeit in a good-humored way.

"He hardly strikes me as the sort of man who goes around making up stories, Kate. Except, I suppose, when he is writing one of those clever plays. But there would be no point to making this one up. He asked me to convey the details to you and for us to do this to keep the story in strictest confidence. You will see why, and I agree with Mr. McKinley that it helps explain Andrew's character."

Clever man, Matt McKinley. How could Kate refuse to listen to her headmistress?

"Just under seven years ago his twin

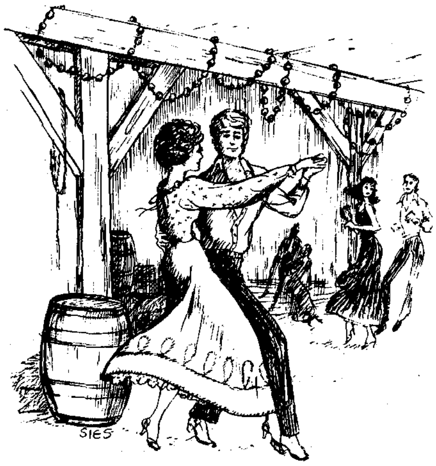
brother Mark was killed in a road accident. Soon after that a young American woman turned up at his house with a child of a month or so old. She explained that the child was Mark's, and she had evidence in the form of letters and photographs to prove it. They had intended getting married before returning to her home in New York—indeed the wedding in a registry office had already been arranged. The girl came from a very strict Catholic family of the old order, who would immediately disown an unmarried girl with a child. She had little money and she was desperate. I got the impression that Mr. McKinley felt responsible for his brother's actions—twins are sometimes like that. Anyway, he married her and took her home to her family. She had sent them photographs of Mark, but as he and his brother were identical twins, this was no problem. Having established her in respectability with her family, he left New York and went to live in California where he could write in peace. He never saw the child, Andrew, until a few months ago. He received the news from her family that his wife had died of cancer, but it was only last year that he decided to go and see Andrew, and discovered that the child was in the charge of his maternal grandparents who had contrived to produce the child we first saw. Horrified and, I suspect, a little conscience-stricken, he decided to take responsibility for the child. So, intending to return to England and put Andrew in a school where he could learn to become a normal, happy child, he bought the Rectory." Miss Ashton paused. "It sounds like the plot for a novel." She watched Kate shift in her seat.

"It's too ridiculous not to be true. Though why he should feel responsible to a woman he hardly knew nor cared about, I'll never know. Anyway," Kate thought, "I suppose it explains why Andrew gets upset when mothers are mentioned."

The barn dance was to be held on the first Saturday of Lynton Cross Week, the week closing with a more conventional dance in the village hall. Kate had arranged for the portable stage to be moved out of the hall and into the barn on the Friday before the dance, and on that day after school she went along to the barn to supervise the setting up of the stage in the correct position. There were also tables and chairs to be arranged along the side of the building, and the stage was to given the correct rural appearance with bales of hay and trailing greenery, plus one large wagon wheel painted yellow and placed in the center of the stage at back. It was as she was descending a ladder, having fixed trails of evergreen over the beams that spanned the barn, that she saw Matt again. Andrew had mentioned the fact that he had been away all week—to America, in fact—and Kate wondered if he had been visiting his wife's relatives. Wearing light blue denim slacks and a matching shirt open at the throat, he stood in the barn entrance surveying the scene of chaos that she hoped would be "all right on the night." She had wondered how she would greet him after the revelations told her by Miss Ashton. He probably deserved an apology, but all Kate could manage was a weak smile that faded as he took her by the arm.

His eyes searched her face, first serious then changing to a slow smile that spread across his lips as he stared at her naked hand.

"Well, well," he said softly. "So the engagement's off? Can I flatter myself that I had something to do with it?"



"There's no flattery involved," Kate said crushingly. "Though admittedly you had something to do with it, you and your precious Alicia. From the moment the pair of you appeared in the village, there's been trouble between John and me. That's twice you've messed up my life, Matt McKinley, and I'll never forget that!"

He didn't immediately reply, though he did look somewhat taken aback. Eventually he said, "I didn't mess up your life, as you put it. You weren't right for each other and you would admit it if only you'd be honest with yourself. You don't look broken-hearted, Kate. And as for the last time—who messed up whose life? Who came up with all that stuff about holiday romances being left to die a natural death? It wasn't me, Kate, who ended that romance!"

Kate stared at him in astonishment for a moment—surely she couldn't have been wrong all those years ago! But then she remembered Peter's words. "Do you think I don't know why you were spending all that time with me?"

"Tell me," he muttered. "If you're so sure, tell me."

"You *know*—oh, leave me alone, please!"

Matt was suddenly aware that their conversation was attracting a lot of attention from the workmen. "All right, Kate, I'll leave you alone—for now. But I'm warning you, we're having this one out. You're altogether too prickly and quick to jump to conclusions. So be warned, my sweet." He leaned forward, kissed her gently, and walked away, leaving Kate with fiery cheeks, much to the amusement of the workmen, who chuckled out loud at her discomfiture.

The barn dance swung into being with a loud chord from the band. It was eight-thirty and a warm and lovely evening. Kate was dragged almost immediately into a square dance, emerging some time later, breathing a little heavily. This was all very pleasant and she knew it was going well, but she couldn't shake off the deprssion that had her firmly in its grip. She tried hard to look cheerful. It would be fatal to appear miserable because among the earlier people to arrive had been John with, of all people, Alicia Allardyce. They had strolled in holding hands and looking inordinately pleased with themselves. Kate hadn't been alone in staring with surprise at them, remembering Alicia's rather caustic comments about John. And if they had set out purposely to embarrass her, they couldn't have succeeded better. In fact, catching one look of malicious triumph on Alicia's face, Kate was more than inclined to think then that was her intention. Despite not actually caring that much what John did, she couldn't shout this out to all those people who gave her sympathetic looks, and even if she had, Kate doubted if she would be believed. Soon she began to feel acutely uncomfortable and was only too glad to get away from the barn and go across to the barbecue where everyone was far too busy to worry about her emotional problems.

Some time later Matt appeared. When he saw Kate he made a slightly ironical salute with his glass and smiled faintly, then came over with a glass of beer. "You look hot and bothered, Kate," he said, smoothly and with an unmistakable double meaning. "Perhaps this will cool you down."

She felt an urge to throw the beer at him, but it did look very inviting and she was thirsty. A moment later his attention was distracted and this gave Kate an opportunity to slip away. She walked to the school building; she had a key which she often used when working late, and Miss Ashton wouldn't object to her going over there and sitting inside for a while. As Kate let herself into the building the darkness wrapped itself warmly around her, and she collapsed thankfully into one of the armchairs. It was very, very quiet, the silence almost tangible and extremely soothing to Kate's shattered nerves.

It must have been half an hour later that Kate heard the outer door creak slightly as it was pushed open, and footsteps sounded, ringing hollowly on the polished corridor tiles. She knew who had come in search of her; somehow it was inevitable that it should be him. For some reason of his own he was punishing her by forcing his presence upon her at every conceivable moment, tightening her nerves and emotions until it seemed that he actually wanted them to snap.

As before he seemed to dwarf the small room. He was holding the key in front of him and grinning wickedly.

"What now? Haven't you had enough of torturing me?"

"If you go sneaking off on your own, you should expect unwelcome attention. I saw you go and it seemed an ideal opportunity to speak to you alone, so I followed. I said I would make you listen and obviously the only way is to lock you in so you have no alternative but to do so."

"I've already heard your story," Kate said wearily. "Surely that was the reason you told Miss Ashton, knowing she would pass it on to me."

"Well, yes," he admitted. "It was a sneaky move, but you know you did ask for it. I trust you do believe me now?"

"I suppose so."

"Don't you think I deserve that long overdue apology?"

"No. This is ridiculous. We can't stay here. People will miss us."

"Of course we can stay here. Staying is no problem. For you the problem is leaving. You'll stay here until I choose to let you out." He held up the key. "Do you want to try to take it?"

"No, I don't. But I will be missed. What would people think if they knew we were in here together?"

"The worst, probably. People usually do. Not very good for your reputation, Kate, but never mind that. When we've had our little talk I'll let you out."

"We have nothing to say to each other Matt! This is no place to talk." Kate was getting a little claustrophobic, and her desperation was conveyed to him for he relented a little.

"All right. I'll see you later, somewhere else. But you must promise me you'll turn up—a real promise. If you don't keep it, I'll come and find you, no matter where you are."

Anything to get out of that room and the close proximity to him. Kate nodded vigorously. "All right, I promise. Where?"

"Now, let me see . . . how about the abbey ruins at midnight? A midnight tryst, Kate, very romantic."

His eyes sparkled. He was enjoying himself tremendously and probably didn't care what people would say about the two of them being cloistered together for so long, not only together but actually within the school building. But a school teacher in a small town like Lynton Cross just can't afford gossip of that kind. The thought of being alone with him at the abbey ruins, even the prospect of getting there in the dark, made Kate shudder, but she agreed because she just had to get out.

That done, he kissed her fervently. She fought a little but was too tired and excited to really struggle—or so she told herself.

"Dear Kate, let's have our rendezvous tomorrow. It is late and you should go home to sleep soundly in your narrow, virginal bed." His mouth twisted in a smile that was almost self-derisive. "Tomorrow then, Kate?"

"When?"

"You go to church, don't you? Then will do. You may come to me after church, sweet Kate."

It was an odd way of putting it, but just then she was too grateful at being allowed to leave him unscathed to worry about the meaning behind his words. And relieved not to have to go through the darkness of the Rectory woods to God-knew-what kind of assignation. Strangely, she never once thought of not going. Yet she didn't believe for one moment that he would actually carry out his threat if she hadn't gone, of finding her and dragging her there. Kate just wanted to find out what he had to say. She loved him—more than she had seven years ago. Now the love was adult and in no way resembled the hero-worshipping infatuation of that time. Kate was sure she would be hurt by him again—it seemed almost inevitable. But she couldn't banish him from her thoughts or her life. It would be like cutting off a limb. In addition, it was impossible.

It was a beautiful Sunday morning, which Kate hoped might prove a good omen, and she thought the church service had never been lovelier. She joined in the hymn singing with enthusiasm, smiling sunnily whenever she caught someone's eye, trying hard not to think about Matt because her thoughts were so irreverent. Kate just couldn't think about him calmly, dispassionately, without recalling the firm sweetness of his kiss, the hard, muscular body as familiar to her memory as his voice and the touch of his hands. Such thoughts were not suitable for church, Kate knew, and tried hard to keep her mind on the service. For some reason, after the depressive thoughts of the previous night, she had awakened in a highly optimistic mood and so far everything, even the weather, had contrived to keep this a lasting attitude.

After church she was held up for a while for there was, as always, the usual group gathered outside, exchanging gossip, and today there was the additional subject of the barn dance to be thrashed out. It was amazing, but nobody had noticed Matt or Kate going into the school. Poor Miss Thomas, the village gossip, would have been heartbroken to know what she had missed!

Eventually Kate escaped, cutting through the churchyard and making for the Rectory, feeling guilty like a criminal, convinced that everyone was staring at her. She headed for the abbey ruins, skirting the woods but having to tread over soft ground that made the wearing of high-heeled sandals highly impractical. Still, she had wanted to look her best, and there is nothing like high heels to flatter a woman's legs.

Matt had not yet arrived. But it was almost eleven and Matt would be there soon. She speculated about how she should greet him. Should she be cold and aloof, as though she were doing him a favor by coming here? Should she show how pleased she was to see him? Should she let him explain . . . . What was there to explain anyway? She could explain her own behavior—why she had spoken to him as she had on Weymouth Station—but could he explain his? Kate thought perhaps it didn't matter all that much. That was then and now is now. She hadn't imagined the love that flowed between them during that kiss last night. She was sure she hadn't.

But the time went on and the sun, which had been full on her face, shifted slightly so that it shone through the trees, throwing a dappling of shadow upon her. Kate glanced at her watch and saw that she had been there almost an hour. Surely he couldn't have forgotten! Surely he hadn't been joking! A hundred excuses and explanations were banished as soon as they arose and she felt cold, her shoulders sagging dejectedly. Of course, she had been a fool, a lovesick, mindless idiot. He hadn't meant anything. He had been leading her on in the cruelest possible way. She must have been out of her mind to be so taken in after all that had gone on before.

Determined to salvage her pride, Kate got to her feet, dusting off the seat of her skirt and heading rapidly across the grass to the path that led through the woods. At least no one had seen her; no one need ever know what an idiot she had been. And if Matt ever mentioned the meeting, she could always pretend she hadn't bothered to keep the appointment.

But she had just reached the oak tree that was the scene of her encounter with Matt and the Siamese kitten when there came a movement in the undergrowth and he appeared from the same direction as before. He looked rather hot and made a face that could have meant anything, relief or indignation, when he saw her.

"I thought you might have gone," he said, smiling quickly. "I'm sorry I'm late, I—"

"Don't bother to explain," Kate said sharply. "It really doesn't matter. I've merely proved to myself what an unmitigated idiot I must be. What did you decide, to let an hour go by and then come along to see if I really was fool enough to wait all this time?"

He frowned, but at the same time seemed to sigh wearily. "No, that wasn't the way of it at all. An important phone call came through from my agent in Los Angeles. I had to take it and could only hope you would understand. I'm glad you're still here but I didn't really expect you would be."

"Well, as you can see, I still am. So now you and your secretary can have a good laugh about that, too. After all, you've told her everything else about me haven't you?"

His brow furrowed. "Have I?" he asked in a low voice. "And how would you know that?"

"She told me. Don't bother to deny it, because she knew all about us in Weymouth, and no one could have told her but you, and I never told anyone except Valerie and she certainly wouldn't have told Alicia. She even knew what color my bikini was!"

Not surprisingly he looked somewhat puzzled by this outburst. Kate turned away, anxious that she shouldn't guess how very close to tears she was, but he came up behind her and turned her to face him, his hands firm on her arms.

"Kate, I didn't . . . I *swear* to you I didn't . . . my God, what do you think I am anyway?" He shook her slightly. "You don't believe me, do you? Even when I tell you straight to your face. I didn't even mention you to her . . . why should I? Do you really think I go around talking about my past to my secretary?

"Your *secretary?"* she snorted.

He put his face close to hers and yelled, "Yes, Kate, my secretary! Despite what you and almost everyone in this blasted village believes, I am not having some kind of sordid affair with Alicia. What kind of working relationship would that be?" Kate didn't answer, so he shook her again. "You still don't believe me, do you? You didn't used to be so distrustful."

"But then I thought you were to be trusted! But I—"

"What?" he demanded. "Tell me. Don't you think I have the right to answer these nebulous charges you appear to be flinging at me?"

But Kate couldn't tell him what Peter had said, for she would be unable to bear listening to him admit to her face that it was true, that he had purposely set out to make her fall in love with him. "You can't even explain how Alicia knew about me," she reminded him and he dropped his hands from her.

"No . . . I can't . . . I can't imagine how she knew." He turned away, going to stand with one foot on a low stone wall, his forearms resting on his raised thigh. "It's ridiculous. No one could have—" He halted then and frowned before emitting a little laugh. "Of course! The photograph, Kate! Remember that picture we had taken on the beach at Weymouth? You were wearing that bikini I bought. I still have the photo in my desk drawer. Alicia has probably seen it a score of times. You haven't changed much, so no doubt she recognized you easily. Also, the clock on Weymouth Front is in the background so almost anyone would know the place."

"It's awfully glib," Kate said, still afraid to believe him or trust in him.

"Blast you, Kate, you're the most awkward, disbelieving, distrustful creature I've ever come across and I won't take being called a liar, not by you or by anyone!" He caught at Kate's arms and shook her so hard she felt as though her head was in danger of rolling off, and Kate put up her hands, catching at his jacket front to try to stop him. Eventually he did stop and they looked at each other in surprise.

"All right, I believe you," she gasped, out of breath. "I'm sorry."

"So you should be. But at least we're getting somewhere at last. And now, Kate, you're going to tell me exactly why you behaved so oddly seven years ago, saying you didn't want me to call at your home, that you thought I was too old for you and all that nonsense."

Kate shook her head frantically. "I can't talk about that! I won't! I said it because I meant it, all of it!"

"If you tell lies I shall shake you again. You know you didn't mean it. I know you didn't. You loved me then, you told me so enough times. And what's more, I think you still do. I don't believe a girl can kiss a man the way you've kissed me a couple of times lately without loving him. Not your kind of girl anyway. You love me, Kate, and you're going to admit it now, and without any excuses, contradictions or qualifications."

"No!" she whispered, horrified at the way events had taken a turn much for the worse.

"Yes! Say it, Kate. I love you. Say it!"

"Stop it," Kate shrieked. "You have no right to treat me like this! Who do you think you are, tearing someone's emotions into shreds the way you're doing? I hate you! You're conceited and arrogant and . . . ." He stopped any further insults with his mouth on hers, and though for a moment Kate attempted to struggle in a feeble sort of way, eventually this resistance died away as she leaned against him and slid her arms around him. He lifted her easily into his arms, and she was vaguely aware that he carried her into what had once been the north transept of the abbey, where the sun was warm and they were sheltered from the breeze as well as from prying eyes, and set her down on the grass, her back against the warm grey stone. Kate opened her eyes then and looked at him as he crouched before her, holding both her hands firmly in his. He smiled faintly then and lifted her hands one at a time to his mouth, kissing them on the palms. There was no answering smile forthcoming from Kate. She leaned against the wall and stared miserably at him. He had beaten her at last; Kate felt defeated and empty and her voice reflected her bitterness.

"All right, so I love you . . . you've made me say it. I suppose that makes you feel good."

He nodded. "It makes me feel very good," he returned, grinning broadly. "Though I suppose it was mean of me to make you admit it first. But you see, Kate, I don't think you would ever have said it if I hadn't forced you to do so. You built this wall around yourself and it's been the devil's own job to knock it down." Kate didn't believe her ears. "Did you say . . . first?"

He smiled and nodded, leaning forward and kissing her lightly, merely brushing his lips across her cheek. "I don't suppose you'll believe this either, but I've always loved you. Or almost always, anyway. By the end of that first evening in Weymouth I knew it."

"But Matt, Peter said—" Kate shook her head in astonishment. He caught her to him then, crushing her lips beneath his, kissing her until they were both exhausted with frayed emotions and the sudden onslaught of long-submerged passions. Then he moved back, getting swiftly to his feet and helping her up.

"It's highly dangerous down here. I haven't got that much self-control and I should probably end up making love to you. Apart from the fact that I'm determined you'll have a wedding ring on your finger first, I'm a little too old to put up with the discomforts of the hard ground. You really can't beat a nice cozy bed." He grinned comically.

"I don't understand," Kate told him. "Peter said . . . he told me—oh, Matt, he came to see me when I was still in Weymouth and he said you were—"

"I know," he said softly, tightening his grip on her. "I know what Peter said and he was a blasted nuisance. If it wasn't for him getting things wrong and opening his big mouth, we'd have been married years ago. You'd probably be the mother of two or three lovely children by now. Unfortunately I didn't find out for years what he had told you, and for a while it seemed too late to put things straight between us." Kate was beginning to feel again; now that the shock of what he had told her was wearing off, a strange and lovely warmth of well-being was spreading through her. Yet even then she could scarcely believe that she was there with him; that he had really said he had loved her for all those years.

"Of course," Matt went on in a solemn voice, "it's difficult to see how things might have turned out . . . in different circumstances." He rubbed one hand through his thick hair and frowned distractedly.

"You mean, because of Andrew?" Kate ventured to ask, and he glanced at her and nodded.

"I owe you an explanation about that, more of one than you've already had," he said slowly. When she shook her head and would have denied it, he kissed her and said, "Yes, I do. It's a little difficult after so long to remember exactly how I felt that winter when Gina—she was Andrew's mother—turned up. She was a nice enough girl, typical of Mark's type for he always seemed to pick such helpless women. I didn't doubt that they had really been in love. I was feeling pretty low—Mark's death had knocked me out, following, as it did, the events of that summer. No—Kate!" She turned in distress away from him. "It was a misunderstanding between us and I don't doubt that you suffered equally. The thing is, I was well and truly off women and didn't much care what happened to me. If, by marrying Gina I could, in a roundabout way, help Mark, it was no great sacrifice. Needless to say, there was never anything in our marriage; it was in name only. She was only too willing for me to disappear out of her life the moment her people had been assured of the respectability of her marriage."

Kate had begun to realize that her own misery had been little and shallow beside his. For she had been younger and thus more easily healed, and hers had been only a single grief. She remembered all she had accused him of and was heartily ashamed. "Oh, Matt, I'm so sorry," she murmured. "When I think of all the terrible things I said to you—!"

"You didn't know, love. One way or another we've had a lot of hurdles to get over, haven't we? So we might as well clear it all up. Peter told you I had come to Weymouth with the sole intention of making you fall out of love with him and in love with me, right?"

Kate nodded. "Wasn't it true?" she asked tentatively.

"Basically it was true though I—let me start from the beginning. You know what Peter was like, Kate, very generous and good-hearted but totally hopeless at judging human nature. He had been take for a ride so often by scheming females even before he was twenty. He attracted gold-diggers like honey attracts wasps."

"And you thought I was like that?" Kate as able to smile now because she was so secure in his love. He bent his head and their lips touched lightly.

"I suppose I was a bit cynical about it, but I'd had experience with Peter's choice of women. However, as soon as I saw you I knew I was on the wrong track this time. I thought it might even be worth encouraging you both. At least, married to you, Peter wouldn't be so vulnerable to other women." He laughed softly. "Of course, by the end of the evening, I had determined that there would be only one man for you and that man certainly wasn't Peter!"

Lost in wonder at this, Kate could only stare, her eyes huge, and he laughed again, sweeping her firmly into his arms and claiming her mouth with his. There was triumph now in that laugh, but she thought that on the whole he could be excused that.

"If only I'd known," she whispered later. "I was so upset and angry when Peter told me what you—what he believed you had been up to, that I had to hit back." She snuggled closer to him, her head resting in the warm hollow of his shoulder. "You looked so angry when I left you at the station . . . but I thought it was just hurt pride."

"Angry? I could have broken your neck. I had intended keeping our relationship very much alive though you were so young that I thought I ought to give you a few months before I said anything definite. Which was why I never told you I loved you . . . perhaps that was a mistake. I don't know. But when you came out with all that stuff, so convincingly, too, I was furious. Hurt pride? Maybe it was partly that. It was only later that it began to hurt. I used to imagine what I would do to you if I could somehow get you in my power." He laughed and stroked her cheek and the line of her neck with gentle fingertips. "Not always very nice things, my Kate, though they always ended up with me making passionate love to you." He laughed again at her blush. "Don't be embarrassed, sweetheart. We have a lot of time to get to know each other—a whole lifetime in fact. What's the matter?" A tiny shudder had run through her and she hastened to explain its cause.

"I was just thinking—if you hadn't come here . . . if you hadn't bought the Rectory . . . I never believed in coincidences but—"

"It was no coincidence, silly girl. I knew you were here."

This statement, though it certainly explained the calm way he had accepted Kate's presence when she was stuck up the oak tree, nevertheless caused her to pull away from his arm and gaze in astonishment at him. "But . . . how?"

"Six months ago Peter and his wife came home from Australia where they've been for the last three years. Peter and I were out having a drink one night and he mentioned you. He asked if I'd seen you since Weymouth and said you were mad as fire when he told you what I had been up to. The idiot! How I kept my hands off him I don't know! But it certainly explained your up till then inexplicable behavior. So I asked Peter's wife to phone your parents, pretending to be an old school friend. They said you were teaching here, and I got in touch with an estate agent who found out for me that the only decent building for sale in Lynton Cross was the Rectory."

Kate stared incredulously at him. "You mean you bought the Rectory just so that you could come her to find me?" she asked in an awed whisper that ended up as a sort of squeak. He nodded.

"Proof enough of my undying devotion, darling?"

"I don't think I really need any more proof. But after so long, oh, Matt, suppose you found you didn't like me at all. I mean, after seven years—"

"There wasn't much likelihood of that. But if it had happened, I suppose I would simply have continued to pretend it was a coincidence that brought me here. As it was, I knew very quickly that my feelings hadn't altered, as soon as I held you in my arms when I got you down from that tree." He sighed very heavily. "I realized then and there that I would somehow have to win you all over again because it didn't take long for me to see how much you distrusted me. I reckoned without finding you already spoken for and when I saw that ring on your finger I was pretty well thrown, I can tell you."

"Finding me engaged didn't exactly put you off, did it?" Kate suggested.

"It would have if I'd thought you really loved Nicolson. But when I saw the two of you together in the village hall, I knew at once that he was no obstacle. It was a pretty lukewarm relationship, Kate, and though I honestly never set out deliberately to break the two of you up, I could tell you were never right for each other. That was why I kissed you that night. I was determined to show you what you would be missing if you married him."

"You succeeded," she admitted, and they both laughed before moving once more into each other's arms. This time, when they broke apart Kate put one hand up and ran it lightly over his mustache.

"Why did you grow this?"

"Ah, therein lies a tale," he grinned.

"Tell me."

"When Mark, my twin brother, was a child he had an accident. He fell through a window and cut his upper lip. It wasn't all that bad but he had a fairly noticeable scar so that as soon as he was old enough to shave, he grew a mustache. Unfortunately, when she wrote to her family about Mark, Gina mentioned why he had a mustache. It meant that in order to keep up the pretence, I had to grow one. I shaved it off during the time I was in California but grew it again before going back to New York to fetch Andrew. I keep it now because there's always the possibility that Andrew's grandparents might turn up unexpectedly and though my beard grows very fast, I can't produce a mustache that quickly. They're well into their sixties and very staid and old-fashioned, and I don't see the point in spoiling their illusions about their only daughter." He rubbed his face against Kate's cheek. "Does it tickle?" he asked, grinning.

Kate laughed. "Yes, but I don't mind. It's nice and it suits you. I don't mind at all."

"That's just as well because you're stuck with it for a few years to come anyway. Because I'm not letting you slip away from me again. And, in fact, we're getting married as fast as it can be arranged. What do you say to that, my sweet Kate?"

She smiled at him. "Yes, please," she said meekly.

The Perfect Spring

(Continued from page 23)

Snow that had threatened picked its way down at last, thickening out the shapes in the garden, piling over the lawn, hanging from the branches like crystallized bats' wings.

The boyish mood was still with him. From his chair by the window he looked and gloated. "Smashing!" he kept saying. "It's smashing!"

He hardly appeared to notice that he could no longer walk in the garden, could hardly walk across the room. He didn't so much take to his bed; rather, he failed to get up. There was just one day when he changed briefly, rising early, hurrying back to the window to look at his ceaseless garden and what he saw seemed to wash back into him so that he, too, glowed with the slight sunlight.

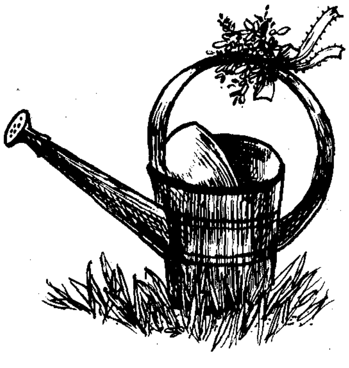
Then he was gone. Like a leaf from one of his own trees, he fell gently down, his life blown away and all around him his final gift, his garden.

The expectancy he had felt passed to her. She refused to mourn, refused to fade, hanging on to something she was not yet clear to see.

Family and friends wanted her to go away. Half of her wanted it, too. A change, a new look at an old world, perhaps some sun to dry out the misery from her bones. But not yet, she said. She was waiting.

Secretly, she was hugging herself. She was as expectant as the growing spring, waiting for something she would never know again and which would take away the pain and the loss. Something that would lift her out of her misery, and back to living and happiness.

Every morning now, in the strengthening light, she would go first to the window overlooking the garden and stand staring as though a great secret would be told to her. She had no idea what was going to happen. Only, she knew, somewhere out there, locked in the spring that was coming, was a moment she would understand and cherish forever.



First the forsythia broke into yellow color; some violets they had encouraged pitted the early green leaves. Frost gave a rich look to the lawn on the still, cold mornings and the silent flowerbeds still kept their edges neat against the black of the footpaths.

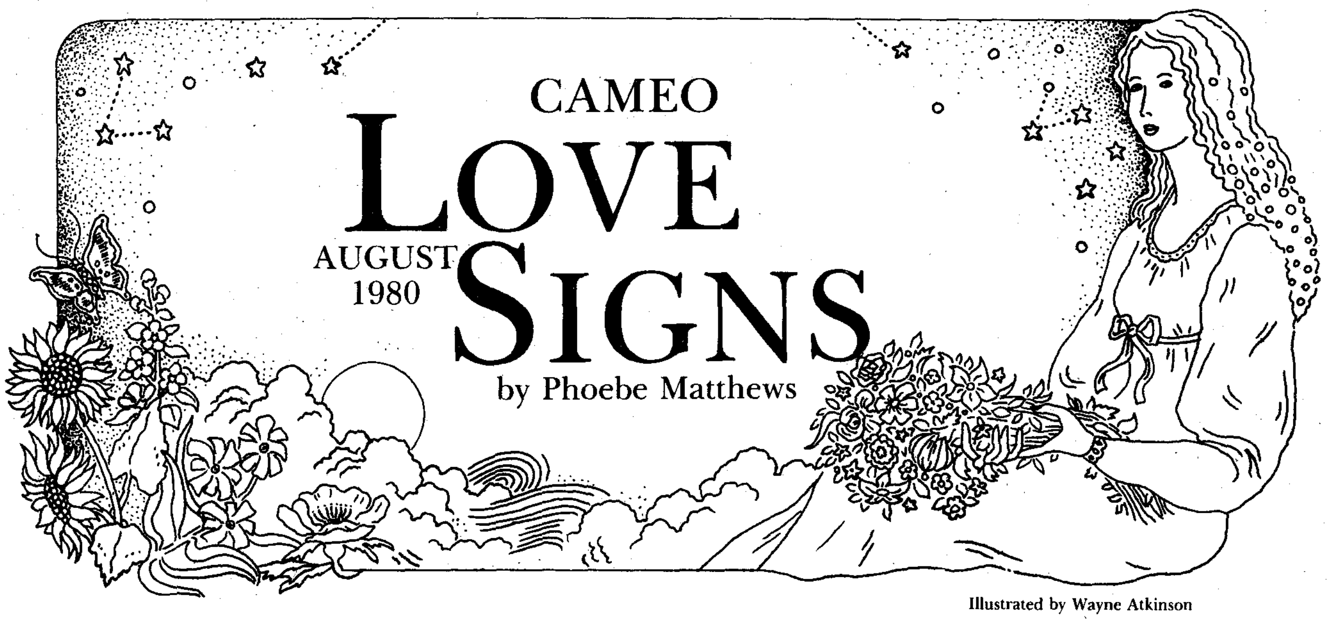
When it came it was unexpected, not at first seen clearly, but immediately and gratefully joyful. Understood, it was heart-soaring beyond expectation.

That morning she had got up early as usual. The sun came early, fingering its way across the piano notes of flower beds. Then it hit the lawn in some great flash of chords and she saw. Yellow heads, mixed with purple, swiftly proud in the light—building, building the message he had left for her.

Trapped, she watched the growing pattern, making out his last rich call, a call he had pinned in bulbs beneath the grass but, which now, in lightning words of yellow and purple strode across the lawn, in the perfect handwriting of flowers accurately and exactly planted.

Looking down from her bedroom she felt the pain flooding out. For clearly and truly the crocuses spelled out across the perfect lawn: "I Love You" then, underneath, in one glorious final triumph, "Always."

It was the most precious gift he could have given her. For the first time in over a year she smiled, her heart full of a perfect spring.



CAMEO
LOVE SIGNS

AUGUST
1980

by Phoebe Matthews

Illustrated by Wayne Atkinson

LEO JULY 23-AUG. 22

With the summer sun lazing along in your sign, sultry Leo, you choose your own emotional destinations, blending your persuasive charms with late summer desires. Fiery Mars reaches out with an unforeseen message from an old flame to disturb your reverie. Though your lovelife remains a sea of turmoil, the second week of August finds the love goddess Venus hinting at romantic interludes that yet may blossom from the shadows of your past. Mercury wisdom guides your fortunes after August 25th. The Leo sun lights your pathway with the clear reds and oranges of August zinnias, your most flattering shades to wear for summer lounging. *Romantic days: 5, 10, 20*

VIRGO AUG. 23-SEPT. 22

Summer wealth could spread its gold throughout your August days, clever Virgo, if you need the sun-bright rays of energy streaming to you now from the fiery planet Mars as it burns through your horoscope to encourage you to enrich your fortunes. Troubled images in the shadowed mirrors of your past will clear away, while the sun brings hope and happiness to the secret corners of your heart. If you still tremble at the beckoning hand of a suggested opportunity, August 14th will bring new clarity and decisiveness, allowing you to better choose the path to lead you through the rose arbors of your desire. The lake-quiet blues of August calm your soul. *Romantic days: 3, 12, 23*

LIBRA SEPT. 23-OCT. 23

Your usual calm, lovely Libra, blushes at the whirlpool of emotions that passionate Mars, now in your sign, stirs in the river of your life. Love and ambition overrun each other, like drifting petals caught in a sudden cascade of white water. Your conflict will begin on August 8th, yet the Venus-created crosscurrent could well carry you to sweeter, richer opportunities if wisely used. The sun now lightens your burdens with the warm and loving presence of a dear, true friend—one whose advice could support you and turn you closer toward the desires you so cherish in your heart. Dress yourself in August reds to match your moods. *Romantic days: 6, 15, 25*

SCORPIO OCT. 24-NOV. 21

Passionate Scorpio, the fire of Mars burns like the August sky through the secret yearnings of some past memory in your heart. Delay decisions that could undermine the languid, tender relationships you have tried so hard to weave. Wait until late September to bring a clear vision to this troubling reverie. The 12th of August could open up new vistas in your life, leading to new happenings and, by August's end, to warmer friendship. While Venus guides you gently through a love affair that deepens thought and faith, the changing, mellow golds and fire hues provide an August background for your passions. *Romantic days: 9, 17, 27*

SAGITTARIUS NOV. 22-DEC. 21

What could be more tempting, provocative Sagittarius, than the sweet and sensuous lure of someone else's flirtatious lover? Take care that the tangled web that sultry Venus weaves for you this month does not leave you caught and clinging to a broken heart or, more, a broken reputation. Flee temptation with the easy grace of a sailboat in a gentle summer breeze; move quickly but effortlessly so that none guess the purpose of your journey. With both the sun and wise Mercury drifting through your horoscope to guide your travels, happiness could find you if you keep your bright eyes wide and your foolish heart protected. Gold flatters now. *Romantic days: 2, 20, 29*

CAPRICORN DEC. 22-JAN. 20

If old alliances have caused your faithful heart unwanted pain, trusting Capricorn, August grants a touch of Venus magic to your romantic longings, renewing faltering ties and strengthening with love your dearest hopes. While unexpected treasure troves appear to enrich your fortunes, wise Mercury helps you find the truest advantage in the surprising gift. The silvery moon touches and enlivens your sign, lending its glowing energy to your pursuits after the 22nd. The soft, dark greens of shadows on an August evening perhaps best suit your thoughts and drape you with a background shade against which your graceful Capricorn charms can best be viewed. *Romantic days: 4, 22, 31*

AQUARIUS JAN. 21-FEB. 19

If troubled thoughts or confusing shadows have darkened your most endearing and longstanding relationships, wise Aquarius, the August sun now casts its healing beams to fascinate your lover's heart and ease your fears. Your summer beauty blooms beneath the guiding light of lovely Venus, so take advantage of your charms, both ethereal and earthly. With your generous grace coming to the force, August holds no stormy skies to cloud your path. Although you languish now with summer, dreaming in the long, warm evenings, after the 23rd you'll find the inspiration for new beginnings. Sunset shades of peach add to your appeal. *Romantic days: 6, 16, 24*

PISCES

FEB. 20-MARCH 20

If ever passion rushed your heart, like a surging river swirling a fragile boat toward the sea, pretty Pisces, August is the time, with love-struck Venus filling you with desire. Take what you wish of offered pleasures, if you must, but guard your heart and clearly keep in mind that August fire blinds your reason. Make no firm commitments, tarry and delay, seek solitude to peer beyond the temptations, or better yet, seek counsel from an old and cherished friend, one who well may contact you around the 23rd. The quiet blues of summer lakes and evening shadows enhance your charms and add their calming spell to your tempestuous heart. *Romantic days: 8, 12, 24*

ARIES

MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Where turmoil, like a summer thunderstorm, disturbed your love-dreams, now sunlight fills and warms the most romantic wishes of your heart, playful Aries. If choices drift your way like billowing lazy clouds reflected moonwhite on a languid lake, the planet Mercury is now the willing, wise counsel of your affairs of heart. Although a Mars-inspired wanderlust may tempt your thoughts, this month, at least, your happiness lies close to home. By the 27th you might well find value in a new-found dream. Your Aries charms are best displayed with August gold, adding its glow to your lovely hair. *Romantic days: 2, 11, 29*

TAURUS

APRIL 20-MAY 20

Ah, loving Taurus! Home is where your heart will linger joyously this month, enriched by the sun and guided by the wisdom of the planet Mercury. While others hurry by in anxious pursuit of summer pleasure, you linger in the shade and let the warm, sweet thrills of August come to you. Romantic Venus inspires messages, and if they are not love sonnets, never mind. A letter or phone call from a long-forgotten friend can bring the pleasures of renewed friendship. While the moon lingers overlong in your sign this month, touching it twice, its energy will turn you toward new pursuits near the 3rd and 30th, while its white glimmer looks well on you. *Romantic days: 8, 12, 30*

GEMINI

MAY 21-JUNE 21

While the love planet, Venus, sheds its kindly beams on your fortune, you should use the best of your Gemini wit to enrich your assets and expand your dreams, sailing ever nearer to your most cherished goals in the closing days of summer. The second week of August brings a warm, encouraging message from a close and trusted friend. By month's end those mist-enshrouded dilemmas, confusing a question that involves your home or happiness should clear, leaving you to enjoy the languid pleasures of your own back garden. With passionate Mars drawing a persistent gentleman within your Gemini spell, wear subtle tones and keep your mood the same. *Romantic days: 5, 16, 20*

CANCER

JUNE 22-JULY 22

Glamorous Venus drifts slowly through your sign this August, charming Cancer, enhancing your beauty and drawing eyes to you as surely as a rainbow inspires awe. Mercury wisdom guides you now, raining its silver glitter upon the many streams that flow into the shimmering lakes of your good fortune. Use its guidance to increase your wealth. With love and passion lingering in your own home, your garden, or your heart, the warm gold tones still suit you best this month, especially in a style that an old love once admired, or perhaps a piece of jewelry that a first love gave you. *Romance days: 8, 18, 30*

NEXT MONTH IN CAMEO

TWO GREAT NOVELS:

The Jade Pagoda
by Betty Hale Hyatt
There was no way for Tawny Butler to know that Lord Gordon Harding would be a greater challenge than the beautiful but dangerous Himalayas she was to cross.

The Beloved Island
by I.M. Fresson
Susan Carilion's inheritance brings her face to face with a long lost relative. But their meeting brings a fiery sort of future.

SPECIAL FEATURES INCLUDING:

A Gift of Love: Unique modern expressions of affection
The Ballad of Rapunzel: or Let Down Your Golden Hair
A Heroine In History: Empress Josephine—A Woman of Romantic Extravagance

PLUS:

Short Stories
Quotes to Remember
Poems of Love
Cameo Love Signs

14400-81400
Ball
Jelly Jars
8 12 oz. jars
Ball
VACU-SEAL
Mason Caps
with dome lids
12 REGULAR LIDS AND BANDS
Quality—Thrift
AN AMERICAN TRADITION

© 1980 Ball Corporation

The Ball Blue Book is available for $2.50 postpaid
from Ball Corporation, Box 2005, Muncie, IN 47302

Our Centennial Year
Ball
1980

AMERICA'S MOST TRUSTED
NAME IN HOME CANNING
CELEBRATING 100 YEARS

Cover Girl
Cheryl Tiegs

The good skin look of Clean Make-up.

COVER GIRL
COVER GIRL CLEAN MAKE-UP

The look is pure Cover Girl.
The clean is pure Noxzema.

It's the look that makes you feel good about looking good. Not just coverage. Not just color. But a totally natural, healthy-looking look. From the only make-up with clean Noxzema® ingredients. There's no other make-up like it. It's the look that's good to your skin.

Cover Girl® Clean Make-up
by Noxzema

©1980 Noxell Corp.
Cover Girl is a registered TM of the Noxell Corp.